Fine and Rare Oriental Rugs and Weavings

FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

AN IMPORTANT EXHIBITION HELD IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE WORLD OF ISLAM FESTIVAL 1976

ANGLO PERSIAN CARPET COMPANY
FOUNDED 1910

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THE EXHIBITION COMMENCES ON SATURDAY 15th MAY
& CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER MONTHS
OPEN TUESDAYS TO SATURDAYS FROM 9.30 TO 6.00
(THURSDAYS UNTIL 8.00 pm)

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ILLUSTRATED ON COVER: NUMBER 11, RARE DAGESTAN WITH SILK, DATED 1912

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The Anglo Persian Carpet Company

FOUNDED 1910

The famous shop of the Anglo Persian Carpet Company in South Kensington Station Arcade is the oldest established Oriental Carpet shop in London and has, over its many years of trading, gained a reputation as one of the leading suppliers in the world of outstanding rugs, carpets, weavings and other Oriental textiles.

From its earliest days, the Anglo Persian Carpet Company has specialised exclusively in supplying the finest rugs from all the major Oriental origins, each piece being individually selected as a definitive example of its type. The shop has, moreover, become prominent in rug collecting circles for consistently acquiring and putting up for sale rare and important works not normally available on the open market. The careful selection policy exercised by the Company's experts has been traditionally regarded as the cornerstone of the shop's success and reputation—clients have always been able to rely upon the authenticity and high quality of every rug in the shop, allowing them to purchase with confidence at all times.

For reasons of its selection policy, its reputation for honesty and expertise in the field of Oriental rugs, and for its extensive range of services and benefits, the Anglo Persian Carpet Company is patronised by some of the most discriminating clients in the world. Major financial institutions, the great educational establishments, embassies, museums, art galleries, public buildings and trusts, together with a host of individuals of international standing and renowned taste, have, through their continuing custom, provided an outward testimony to the shop's reliability and reputation which no advertisement or organised promotional activity could match. Such clients have made the shop one of the great success stories in the Oriental carpet world, allowing it to acquire rare and exceptional works whenever possible, as well as maintaining a level and range of fine stock virtually unmatched by any other establishment, available at the most straightforward and realistic prices in London.

The present exhibition is the first event on such a scale to be organised by the Anglo Persian Carpet Company. With its close links with the Islamic countries built up over a period of more than 65 years, the occasion of The World of Islam Festival seemed a fitting opportunity for the shop to exhibit its most prized and important works. As mentioned earlier, a few extremely rare pieces from the company's private collection are being released for sale for the first time ever on this occasion, and their appearance is expected to cause considerable excitement in Oriental rug circles. Other items in the exhibition have been collected specifically for this event over the past years, every work being carefully chosen by the Anglo Persian Carpet Company's experts to maintain the exceptionally high level of exhibits. For, in the Oriental carpet world, a commemorative exhibition of old rugs and carpets by the Anglo Persian Carpet Company is inevitably regarded as an exhibition of the finest and most beautiful rugs still available for collection. We trust that this exhibition fulfils such an expectation.

Introduction

This special exhibition of rare, old and antique Oriental rugs and carpets is being held by the Anglo Persian Carpet Company to commemorate the World of Islam Festival. The exhibition collection consists of an exceptional number of definitive old and antique carpets with several works selected from the private collection of the Anglo Persian Carpet Company—a unique group of very rare and valuable works collected over many years, and not normally shown or made available to the general public.

The series of lectures, exhibitions and events which will characterize the World of Islam Festival over the coming months will lay great emphasis upon the importance of Oriental carpet as an expression of the Islamic artistic spirit. Indeed, the Oriental carpet has for well over a century provided Western scholars and collectors with the most accessible and appealing link with the creative and imaginative essence of the Islamic faith, while even the most humble prayer rug has brought with it into the Western household a means of understanding a religion and culture which would otherwise remain remote and incomprehensible. The Oriental carpet has been an ambassador for the country and civilization which produced it, and the study and appreciation of Oriental carpets by Westerners has been inextricably involved with the study and understanding of every aspect of the World of Islam.

In this exhibition, we have attempted to illustrate the rich diversity of style and expression which is to be found in the art of the Islamic carpet. The exhibits date from the periods before Western preferences and demands influenced the natural inclinations of the Oriental carpet makers. The carpets and weavings in the exhibition are, therefore, authentically Islamic in character, with none of the commercial compromise which has eroded the meaning and integrity of so many later works. We have selected exhibits which, in our opinion, provide a true and unsullied insight into the Islamic imagination—carpets which were made not to please others, but to please and inspire the carpet makers themselves.

Not every rug or carpet classified as Oriental is Islamic—from the high Caucasian mountains, Christian Armenians made, and still make, hand-knotted rugs of exceptional beauty; while from China came the Buddhist carpets of Kansu, Ninghsia and Tibet. From each of these distinct and thriving cultures, the Islamic carpet has borrowed ornaments, colours and compositions, altering and adapting them with consummate skill until they become recognisably Islamic in character: the overwhelming richness and variety of the Islamic carpet, even in comparison with other Oriental carpets, is largely a result of this ability to absorb and integrate outside influences with an assurance which is seldom less than astonishing. We have included a number of carpets in this exhibition from non-Islamic Oriental sources to illustrate some of the influences which have gone to make the true Islamic carpet representative of the entire spectrum of Oriental art and culture.

The Oriental carpet is, of course, far more than a piece of historic or cultural evidence—it is, first and foremost, an object of beauty and delight. While the Islamic background to the carpets in this exhibition was an important consideration, we have been mainly concerned with selecting examples which possess that unique and either powerful or delicate beauty which is the hallmark of the finest Oriental carpets. Many of the exhibits are extremely rare works—the rarity of any art object will often be found to relate directly to the degree of beauty it possesses. This is particularly so with carpets—the most beautiful examples usually exist in small numbers: few weavers had the skill and artistry to create such works, fewer still of these carpets are ever released by their owners, the pleasures of a beautiful object far outweighing the continually mounting profits which could be realised by their sale.

The worldwide reputation of the Anglo Persian Carpet Company and the regular custom of our discriminating clientele have allowed us to continue trading over the years without the necessity of annual sales, publicity-seeking gimmicks or promotional exhibitions. Encouraged by the excitement generated by the World of Islam Festival, and in recognition of the importance and cultural significance of this festival, we are, therefore, mounting this, our first major exhibition of rare old Oriental carpets. Once the decision was taken to stage such an exhibition, we felt it would be only fitting if some of the finest pieces from our private stock were released for sale on this occasion. It is hoped that clients both old and new will enjoy these rare and beautiful carpets and weavings, will take advantage of the opportunity to acquire works so seldom seen on the open market, and will consider the exhibition a fitting tribute to the World of Islam Festival, and the spirit of understanding and cultural interchange which that Festival represents.

Caucasian Rugs

The Caucasus, a land of vast mountains shelving down to the Black Sea in the West and the fertile plains of the Caspian Sea in the East, has always been, as it remains today, one of the most remote and unknown areas of the Near East. Few travellers have ventured there, fewer still books or journals tell us anything of the lives of the people who have lived there for thousands of years. Yet its very remoteness, and the natural security of its hidden valleys and mountain strongholds, have made it a place of refuge for many races and tribes who have placed their independence and the preservation of their culture above physical well-being or the rewards of living in the outside world. Within the virtually impenetrable mountains, and in the villages and settlements of the plains and forests, it has been estimated that some three hundred and fifty different tribes live, speaking between them approximately 150 different languages and dialects. Among these tribes—few of which are genuinely nomadic, mostly moving seasonally from settlement to settlement, or else establishing permanent communities in territories won and protected through constant skirmishing—the most renowned are the Lesghians, the Chechens, The Cherkassians, The Talish, The Mountain Jews, The Mountain Tarters and The Kumuks. Linguistically, the land is divided roughly into West Caucasian, South Caucasian (including Georgian) and East Caucasian, or Chechens-Lesghian. Later invasions and occupations by Indo-Europeans and Turks, including the Cimmerians, the Scythians, The Medes, The Armenians, The Parthians, The Sassanids, The Mongols, The Persians, The Turks and, finally in the 19th Century, the Russians created the extraordinary ethnic mixture of the Caucasian population, a population which was eventually to find its greatest cultural and artistic expression in the hand-knotted carpet, an object of art and utility which alone was able to give a cohesion to this cauldron of various races who found themselves either settled or stranded in the giant fold of the Caucasian mountains.

Possibly as a result of the constantly changing state of the population of the Caucasus, of alien cultures imposing themselves upon other alien cultures, always against a backdrop of major wars, inter-tribal raids, the destructive power of the huge armies of the East and West perpetually crossing and re-crossing the land, a defined civilization which was essentially Caucasian in character does not appear to have developed until about the beginning of the 18th Century, and not until the end of that Century did such a civilization come to full flower. And, as with the Turkoman tribes of Central Asia, the civilization of the Caucasus found its finest (one might almost say, its only) expression in the hand-knotted carpet and, to a lesser extent, the woven textile.

When the consciousness of the Caucasus ('civilization' is perhaps too defined a word to describe the emergence of Caucasian culture) did eventually find its expression in the knotted carpet, the turbulence of its background, the extraordinary mixture of races and tribes who contributed to it, even the wild and dramatic landscape from which it came, produced a type of art so charged with energy, so powerful and varied, possessing so many facets and subtle shades of differentiation that there is simply nothing to compare it with. The Caucasian rugs of the 18th and 19th Centuries, with one or two earlier examples probably from the end of the 17th Century, are unique creations—totally distinctive, different to all other types of Oriental carpet, and almost consistently exceptional. Up until the last decades of the 19th Century, when the outside world started to infiltrate and influence the carpet makers of the Caucasus and some deterioration in standards began to be noticeable, almost every Caucasian rug of this major era was, if not a masterpiece, at least an outstanding example of the possibilities of the knotted textile, and a definitive expression of both the weaver's art and the spirit of the country from whence it came.

To the rug collector of today, this explosion of creative energy which expressed itself in the Caucasian rug of the 18th and 19th Centuries comes as a godsend. With the finest and most artistically perfect carpets of Persia and Turkey originating from the 16th & 17th Centuries, only a few of these works have survived intact, and of those few virtually every one is a prized museum exhibit. With the 'Golden Era' of the Caucasus occurring almost three centuries later, and occurring in a most prolific manner, several rugs and weavings of the most superlative character remain not only in good condition, but in sufficient numbers to allow them to circulate on the open market. Of the three great producing areas of the Oriental carpet—Persia, Turkey and the Caucasus—only the Caucasus provides the contemporary collector with a reasonable choice of rugs from its great period. That the number of such rugs is fast dwindling is hardly surprising—collectors from throughout the world are acquiring them wherever and whenever it is possible. But the very fact that we have been able to gather a significant group of such pieces for this exhibition, albeit over a period of several years, indicates that it is still quite possible for the private collector to form a collection of important Caucasian rugs from the height of the great period, while the possibilities of so doing with the major Turkish and Persian carpets have long since passed.

Despite its enormous variety in terms of design, colouring and weave, the Caucasian carpet possesses certain characteristics of its own which make it distinguishable from the works of other Oriental origins. Invariably tied in the symmetrical or Turkish knot, usually upon warps and wefts of wool (with cotton being more frequent in later examples), the material of the pile is local sheepswool, occasionally inlaid in silk in a few very rare examples (see No. 11). All-silk Caucasian rugs do exist, but they are possibly the rarest of all Oriental carpets, with only a few known examples in existence. The designs are almost always strictly geometrical, the only exception to this being a special type of decorative carpet commissioned by Russian officers stationed in the Caucasus in the 19th Century and displaying a floral arrangement of European inspiration, intended to harmonize with the French furniture then in vogue in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Generally, however, the Caucasian rug displays a strict geometry, ranging from the dramatically bold emblematic style of the Kazaks to the highly intricate trellis designs of Dagestans and the closely-worked rectilinear abstraction of Shirvans and Kubas. The geometric drawing of these rugs is usually more precise and confidently-stated than that of the tribal or village rugs of Persia (although very similar to the Azerbaijani works from North of Tabriz), and is quite different in general character to the rugs of the Turkoman tribes. Most similar are certain mountain rugs from Turkey, particularly from the Bergama district and some of the Kurdish areas of Eastern Turkey, and one must occasionally fall back on close structural analysis of pile and materials in order to accurately determine the precise origin of such apparently similar pieces.

If the range of design found in the rugs of the Caucasus is a testimony to the divergent and complex influences behind the creation of their style, then their superb sense and mastery of colour is a symbol of the cohesive culture which developed in the area during the 18th Century, finding expression in some of the most powerful and beautiful colour combinations ever displayed within the confines of an Oriental carpet.

The great skill of the Caucasian weaver, aided considerably by both the master dyers and the outstanding natural dyes at their disposal, was in the powerful or striking juxtaposition of very strong colours, often covering large areas of the design, to produce combined effects of unforgettable beauty in what can only be described as a most adventurous manner. While the Persian approach to colours was delicate and sophisticated in the extreme, combining a very wide range of colours which blended exquisitely with each other, shade echoing shade, the Caucasians went more for the surprise effect—bold, rich colours placed against each other in the most startling arrangements, producing a primitive, almost barbaric, beauty of quite a different order to the carefully modulated and ordered harmonies of the classical Persian carpet. Yet however dramatic and unexpected the colour mixtures employed in the old Caucasian rugs, very rarely were they garish or clashing—an intuitive sense of harmony characterizes these period pieces, abetted to some extent by the mellowing process of time, producing a most pleasing and satisfying visual experience closer perhaps to certain schools of European abstract painting than to more traditional forms of Oriental aesthetics. The peculiarly 'modern' appearance of so many of the old Caucasians has made them the most favoured and successful form of floor decoration in the more avant-garde contemporary home interiors.

The rug-making communities within the Caucasus, divided roughly into provinces and districts, maintained a degree of independence from each other surprising in such a relatively small area. The lack of roads and other forms of communication, the barriers of language and culture, often the direct rivallry of neighbouring tribes and family groups resulted in a great diversity of rug types, each with its own distinct characteristics. Yet while the designs and colourings of rugs produced by groups often only a few miles away from each other can often differ remarkably, such exclusiveness was slowly eroded through migration, tribal inter-marriage, the gradual infiltration of outside influences into remote communities, to the extent that similar designs and colour schemes often appear in rugs from totally different districts within the Caucasus, especially in those made towards the end of the last century and up to the 1917 Russian Revolution. Thus, the surest method of distinguishing rugs from the different Caucasian districts is by means of their structure, the methods of rug-making traditional to a given area always being the last feature of their general characteristics to be influenced or affected by outside pressures. And the enormous variety of rug-making techniques exhibited by the old Caucasian works is one of the most fascinating and illuminating aspects of their study and collection. In the following brief notes on each of the rug producing districts illustrated in the exhibition, technical and recognition notes must by necessity be brief but, combined with an examination of the rugs themselves, should provide a useful introduction to the rich variety of pleasure and interest which is offered by the Caucasian rugs of the great period.

KAZAK

In the South West of the Caucasus, the Kazak district is one of the most mountainous and remote of the major knotting areas. The population in the last century was predominantly a mixture of Armenians and Kurdish tribesmen, with several smaller sub-groups and tribes also contributing to the general character of the region, and to the famous rugs which originated there.

The general tendency of rugs made by mountain people to have a long, loosely-knotted pile is nowhere more apparent than it is in Kazaks. The wool of the nap is usually so long that it lies at an angle to the warps, creating a brilliant silky sheen when viewed along its lie, while a magnificently rich depth of shade and colour is brought out from within the pile against its slant. The knotting is not so coarse as in most mountain rugs, but the length and density of the nap makes any real degree of fineness irrevelant, and the number of knots to the square inch is of little importance in the quality evaluation of these rugs.

As characteristic as the long, highly lustrous wool of the pile are the designs and colours of the old Kazaks—the boldness of each motif, the virile strength of the colours, the simply-stated yet evenly delineated repeated devices of borders and guard stripes provide for most connoisseurs the essence of Caucasian rug knotting, although such a general overall impression of the area is created mainly by the highly defined style of the Kazaks, and of rugs from neighbouring districts strongly influenced by this distinctive character. If the Kazak is the most 'Caucasian' of all rugs, it is by no means so because of its availability : the good period Kazaks are today very rare, they being amongst the most sought-after of Caucasian weaves, appealing strongly to that taste which favours the Caucasian above other styles of Oriental rug, and possessing a unique beauty and a quality of dyes, materials and designs which makes them almost invariably highly desirable, a true expression of the imaginative energy which is a distinguishing feature of the finest 19th Century works of the Caucasus. (From this exhibition, Nos. 33, 36, 42, 43, 56, 57 and 67 provide outstanding examples of the Kazak weave at its most developed stage, important rugs for the connoisseur of traditional Caucasian knotting techniques).

GENDJE

Close to Kazak both geographically and in the general character of its rugs, the district surrounding the village of Gendje was one of varied tribal and semi-nomadic activity which found expression in the rugs and runners brought to the village bazaar, rugs of a distinct appearance, extremely sturdy and among the most primitive and individualistic in design and colouring of the Caucasus. With the weave being very similar to that practised in Kazak, although usually slightly coarser, and the wool of the pile rather less fine than that of the best Kazaks, the designs consist of simply drawn motifs—including latch-hooked polygons and boteh forms— often in an allover pattern, characterized more by a spontaneous creation of a complete effect than by the clear definition of each motif found in Kazaks. Human and animal figures, knotted in at random, were a favourite device of the Gendje weavers.

The colouring is usually less dramatic than that of the Kazak districts—more undyed wool is used, several colours are softer in appearance and there is a distinctive use of pomegranate orange, this deteriorating in some later pieces into an unpleasant aniline orange which is easily detectable by its garishness. Gendjes vary tremendously in quality, and while there are a few pieces which rival any Kazak in terms of beauty and technical standards, these rugs are, on the whole, more representative of the main stream of Caucasian knotting, honest and highly attractive works which seldom aspire to the heights of their rarer neighbours, while maintaining an integrity of purpose and authenticity of tradition holding great appeal for the collector. (Nos. 64 and 70 are definitive examples of the typical old Gendje rug; No. 16 is a more outstanding work, of the finest quality from the second half of the last century).

KARABAGH

Within the same tradition of carpet making as Gendje and Kazak lies the vast Karabagh region, its proximity to North West Persia having a modifying effect on the more strict Caucasian designs of its neighbours, with influences and residues of the Persian floral style often appearing in its rugs.

The pile of Karabaghs is usually more closely clipped than either Kazaks or Gendjes, and the knotting is generally finer. A great variety of designs are found, ranging from angular flower arrangements reminiscent of the Afshari rugs of South Persia, through arrangements of palmettes and medallions which are occasionally similar to certain village rugs from the Turkish communities of Central Persia, to that most Caucasian of all designs known popularly as the Adler or Eagle Kazak, which despite its name derives from just within the borders of Karabagh to the North East.

The most noticeable feature of the old Karabaghs

lies in their colouring—a rich vermilion extracted from the cochineal insect dye provides one of their most satisfying pleasures, while ivory, yellow, dark blue and various other reds frequently complement this superbly rich and infinitely variable shade.

The many long rugs and hall carpets originating from Karabagh may well have been made for Russian officers stationed in the province—the Karabagh weavers were particularly adept at creating designs ideally suited to the runner format. (Nos. 28 and 29 illustrate this skill at its best). For their silky pile, unique and appealing designs and magnificently sombre colouring, Karabaghs are very popular Caucasian rugs, providing a bridge between the most abstract of Caucasian designs and the softer, more elegant lines of the main Persian tradition.

SHIRVAN

Although it is perhaps the rugs of Kazak which most nearly encapsulate the basic character of the old Caucasian rug, it is the rugs of the Shirvan district which provide the most frequently encountered expression of the style. With its neighbouring district of Kuba, Shirvan was the most prolific of the Caucasian rug producing areas of the last century, and it was responsible for the making of some of the finest Caucasian works to have survived.

Apart from a few examples from the more mountainous Western regions of the district (the rugs of Chajli, for instance, are more like Kazaks in general style), Shirvans were made in the warmer plains leading to the Caspian Coast, and are, therefore, quite different in structure and weave from the long-pile rugs of the mountain people.

A fine weave, often with a very high knot count, is combined with a closely-clipped pile to produce rugs in which the degree of detail within each motif, the exactitude of border designs (particularly noticeable in the controlled handling of the corner angles) and the general clarity of the overall design is of a quite different order to the dramatically-stated themes of Kazaks and Gendjes. The kind of evaluative techniques one applies to the old Shirvans (together with Kubas and Dagestans) are, in fact, more in accordance with those applied to the developed urban rugs of Central Persia than with the altogether different set of standards employed in the evaluation of a Kazak, or nomadic and semi-nomadic works from Persia, Afghanistan and Turkey.

Shirvans are identified almost entirely in terms of their weave, with their smooth backs distinguishing them from the slightly more ribbed Kubas and the considerably more ribbed Dagestans. The proliferation of different major designs, of border decorations, and the vast range of superb vegetable colours used in their composition make classification in such terms virtually impossible. The angular, stylized design approach of the Caucasus is here seen at is most developed and intricate; the magnificent mixtures of strong and delicate dye shades, of subtle variations within a single colour, of surprising juxtapositions of shade and motif are brought to a height in the finest Shirvans which almost no other Caucasian rug can match. Obviously, there are many different qualities found in the rugs of Shirvan; but, certainly among those knotted before 1870-80, few rugs will be found which do not offer a level of workmanship and a sureness of touch which is astonishing in its consistency.

Apart from the general classification 'Shirvan', there also exist rugs from the Shirvan district and in the Shirvan weave known as *Marasali* (in which a serrated boteh ornament in the field is combined with a stylized 'animal boteh' motif in the borders) and the *Bidjov* (an ascending arrangement of palmettes knotted in superb wool, often copied by other Caucasian origins).

The wide selection of Shirvan rugs in this exhibition gives some idea of the scope of imaginative invention and technically brilliant craftsmanship and sense of colour which has made the Shirvan rug of the 19th Century among the most admired and respected of the classical Caucasian weaves. Most of the basic designs and qualities are represented here, and the group provides the collector with a unique opportunity to discover and examine the various delights of the Shirvan rug in a selection of outstanding size and rarity.

KUBA

Although, with Shirvan, the Kuba district provided the focal point for the revolution in quality and creativity which produced the great Caucasian rugs of the past 200 years, surviving examples of the Kuba weave are both rarer and finer than are Shirvans, Dagestans or even Kazaks.

Very similar to Shirvans in appearance and often difficult to differentiate structurally, genuine Kuba rugs are among the most perfect products of the Caucasian golden era. Usually, Kubas are classified according to the village or community within the general district from which they come.

Thus, the rare and superbly-made rugs of *Perepedil* (see No. 1) are recognisable by their 'Wurma' or

'Dagger' design, executed in a marvellously close weave and very fine wool. The design was copied extensively throughout the Caucasus, particularly in Shirvan, but it is the authentic Perepedil which remains the delight of collectors.

More highly regarded still are the Chichi rugs, knotted by a remote community of the Chechen tribe in a unique and unmistakeable design employing rosettes in the central field, usually framed in a border of thick scrolling ribbons which give the appearance of diagonal bands (see No. 51, an Armenian variation of the Chichi weave).

The rugs of *Sejshour* (see No. 38) are also extremely rare and highly-prized. The design is usually characterized by a central arrangement of crossed beams, with a unique 'Running Dog' outer border providing a striking and unusual frame. The wool of these rugs is almost invariably superlative.

Kuba was historically the cradle of Caucasian carpet making, and the early 'Dragon Carpets' of the Caucasus which signalled the beginning of the great period of rug knotting are traditionally ascribed to the area. These carpets, among the rarest and most valuable of all known Oriental rugs, are based upon highly stylized and abstracted representations of mythical dragon motifs, these possibly deriving from early Chinese art transmitted throughout the East via the caravans of the ancient Silk Route. As the outstanding example in this exhibition demonstrates, (No. 48), in no other hand-knotted carpet has so powerful and energetic a composition been contained. Here we can see the seeds of that controlled power which distinguishes the later Caucasian rugs in its most vibrant and overwhelming form—the sureness of touch, the mastery over design and colour, the brilliant proportions of each motif, of the field and its borders possess a wild and almost violent beauty which is found in no other type of hand-knotted rug. In any consideration of the later, more restrained, rugs of the Caucasus, the superb designs and wonderful use of colour in these very early masterpieces of Caucasian art need to be taken into account as the origin of one of the great rug knotting traditions.

DAGESTAN

To the North of Kuba lies the district of Dagestan, also renowned during the 19th Century for its thriving production of extremely high quality rugs, usually extremely distinctive in character.

Closely-knotted, with a short pile and a strongly-ribbed back, Dagestans are most easily recognised by their designs. These normally consist of a natural-coloured field, often with a prayer arch, covered throughout with a finely-worked trellis, each section holding a single floral emblem, this often subtly varied throughout the field. Various border devices, often employing stylized 'S' motifs, are expertly handled to bring out the delicate and intricate beauties of this basic design.

It is noticeable that in a very early example of this style (such as No. 31, dated 1813), the amount of variation within each motif, and each row of motifs, is considerable. In later works (No. 11 is a magnificent example, with some details highlighted in silk, an extremely rare incidence of such a technique) the design is far more regular, with greater attention being paid to fineness and evenness of weave, and the minute detail within each emblem.

The rugs of Dagestan, more than those of any other Caucasian provenance, often contain a date knotted in, written in Arabic numerals. The date, when interpreted, will usually be based upon the Mohammedan calendar, and designated as after the Hegira (AH), being the number of years after the Prophet's flight to Medina (622 AD). Arabic numerals appear as follows :—

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

With dates in carpets, the first figure is sometimes omitted, so that the year 1226 can often be written simply as 226.

In order to ascertain a date which corresponds to our own chronology, the fact that Muslims employ the shorter lunar year against our solar year must be taken into account. An accurate method of converting a Muslim date to a Christian one is to divide the Muslim date by 33, subtract this result from the original Muslim date and add 622. Thus the date on the Dagestan No.31—1228 AH—becomes 1813 AD.

The habit of the Dagestan weavers in dating their rugs helps us considerably, by a process of comparison, to date other Caucasian rugs with a degree of accuracy which is seldom possible with other producing areas.

Of all the Caucasians, Dagestans provide the subtlest and most restrained aesthetic experience. They are held in high esteem among collectors for their integrity of purpose, for the high degree of craftsmanship they often display, and for the

generally superb quality of their wool and dyes. The collection of these works here exhibited allows us to enjoy the many aspects of this prized weave, with several of the rugs being shown here possessing a tremendous rarity value seldom encountered in the more generally available later works from the district.

BAKU

Rugs from the Baku district are rarely seen today, and represent one of the triumphs of the great Caucasian tradition. Their sombre colours, the very limited dye palette, an extremely fine weave and a masterly sense of design all combine to make them rugs of outstanding beauty and effect, quite unlike any others from the Caucasian provenance. No. 69, a fine old piece in the most definitive style, provides an extremely rare and valuable example of this most prized yet seldom-encountered weave.

DERBEND

The town of Derbend and its surrounding area on the Caspian Coast produced many rugs from the latter half of the Nineteenth Century onwards which, although not generally so highly regarded as the great Caucasian rugs of Kazak, Kuba, Shirvan, Dagestan, etc., often possess a charm and attractive appearance which makes them worthy of considerable attention.

Their designs are usually borrowed and adapted from other areas, interpreted in the mixture of rich and soft colours which are characteristic of Derbend. They are made in good, lustrous wool, and have a particularly supple, pliable feel to them which makes them easy to distinguish from other Caucasian weaves.

Admittedly, many rather inferior rugs and carpets originated from the Derbend area at around the turn of the century, but a few examples have come down to us which are comparable to all but the most rare and exceptional of the other Caucasians. Rugs and carpets such as Nos. 25, 54, 55 and 66 in this exhibition belie the somewhat dubious reputation of Derbend as a producing district, and the existence of works of such outstanding merit suggest that some re-assessment of the skill and imagination of the Derbend weavers is long overdue.

ARMENIAN RUGS

A certain style of later Caucasian rug in which very soft lambswool and generally paler, more pastel, colours are employed than those of the traditional works are generally referred to as 'Armenian' rugs, knotted from Armenian wool. The designs found in such pieces are adapted from the old designs of Shirvan, Kuba and Kazak, embellished with motifs and figures which found favour among the Armenian weavers. Cotton, as opposed to wool, is often used for the warp and weft threads.

These rugs are becoming increasingly popular with time, their delicate shades and superb wool more than compensating for their lack of artistic originality. While they may hardly be compared favourably with the finest of the genuine old Caucasian rugs, they are extremely decorative and finely made, and we have included a few choice pieces in this exhibition in order to illustrate the general trend the Caucasian rug followed in the early years of this century. The Erivans, in particular, have an authenticity of their own which makes them of interest to the student of Caucasian rugs (see Nos. 26 and 27 for fine examples of these true Armenian rugs).

1. OLD PEREPEDIL (CIRCA 1900) 1·60m x 1·10m

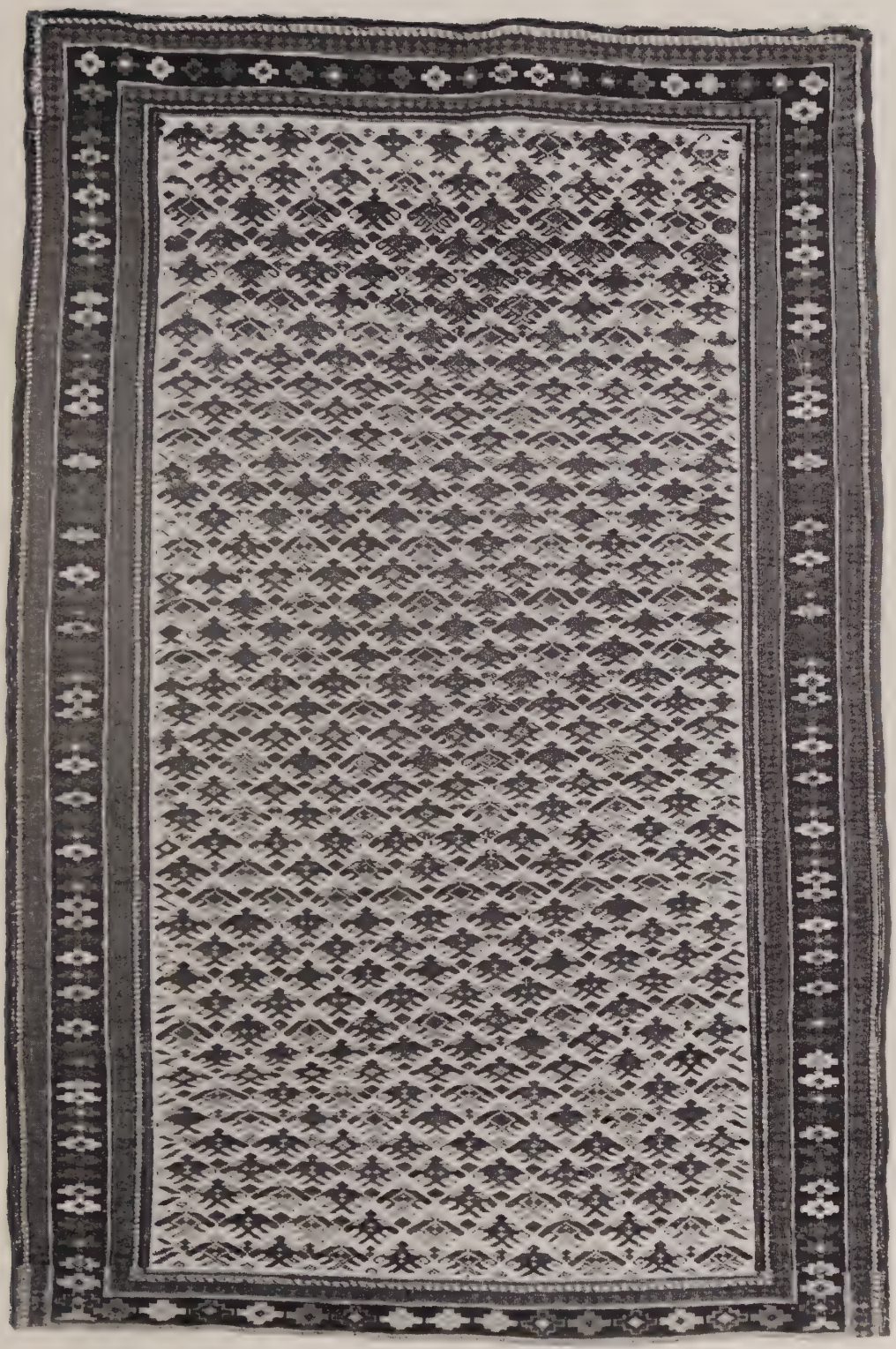
2. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·59m x 1·09m

3. OLD DERBEND (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·65m x 1·19m

4. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·73m x 1·27m

5. ANTIQUE DAGESTAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·41m x 1·16m

6. OLD KAZAK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·20m x 1·23m



7. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·98m x 1·29m

8. SHIRVAN (MID-20TH CENTURY) 1·67m x 1·10m

9. OLD DAGESTAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·82m x 1·08m

10. OLD KAZAK (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·95m x 1·35m

11. OLD DAGESTAN (DATED 1912) 1·50m x 1·14m

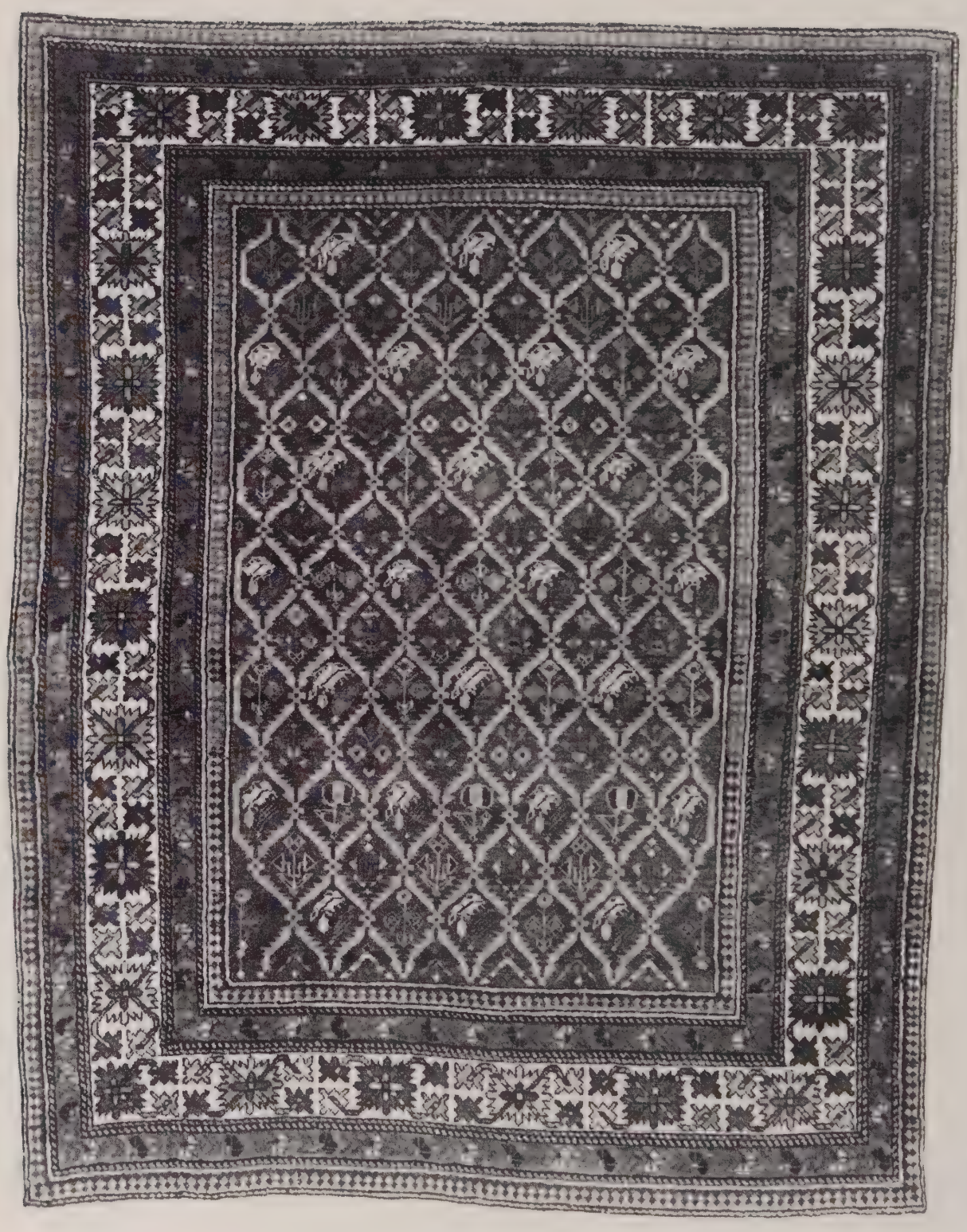
12. OLD SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·68m x 1·31m

13. OLD DAGESTAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·32m x 1·10m

14. SHIRVAN (MID-20TH CENTURY) 1·60m x 1·13m

LEFT 15. OLD KAZAK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·70m x 1·18m

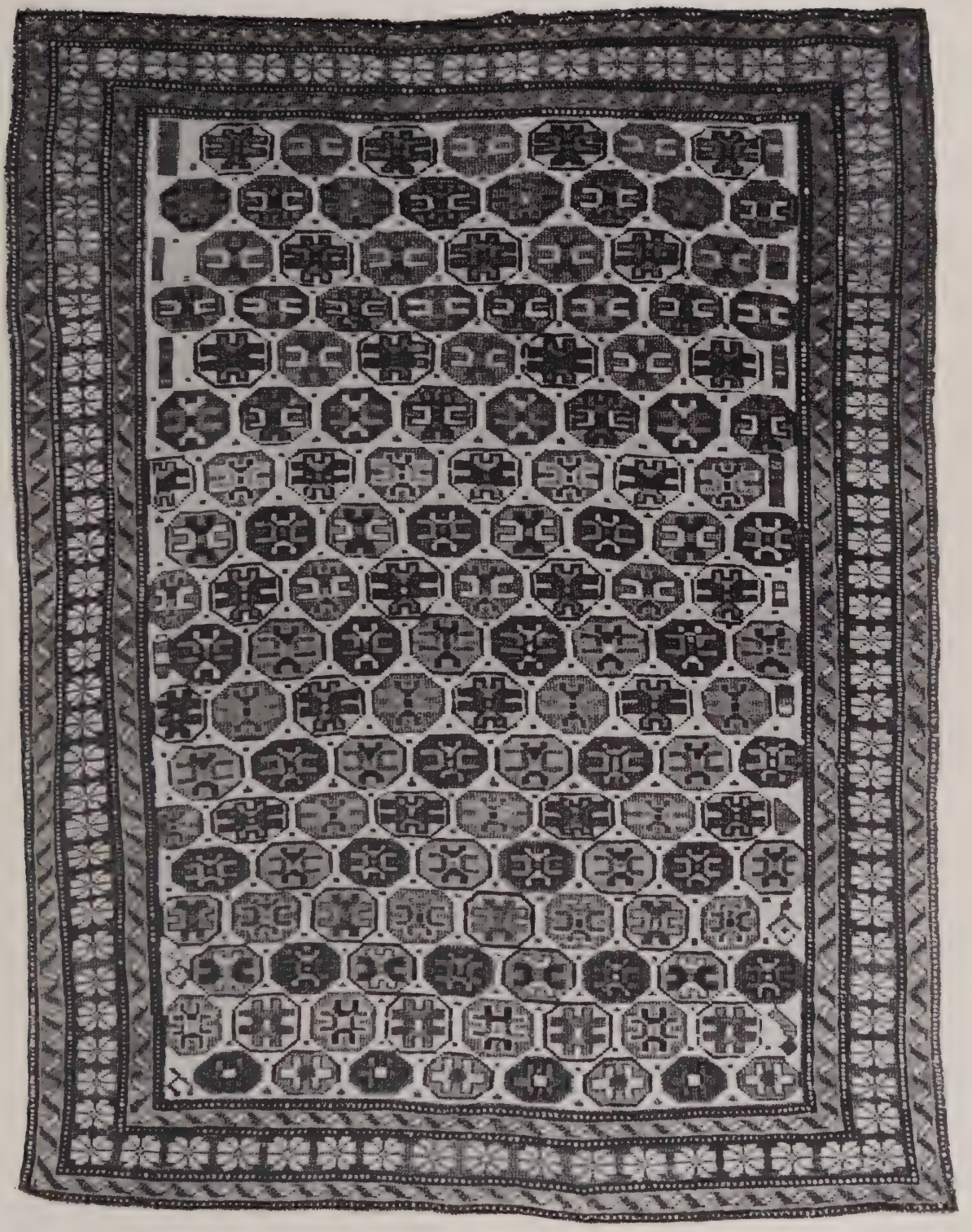
RIGHT 16. OLD GENDJE (CIRCA 1900) 3·11m x 0·99m



17. OLD ARMENIAN SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·52m x 1·21m

18. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·72m x 1·12m

19. OLD SHIRVAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1.62m x 1.24m



20. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·47m x 1·14m

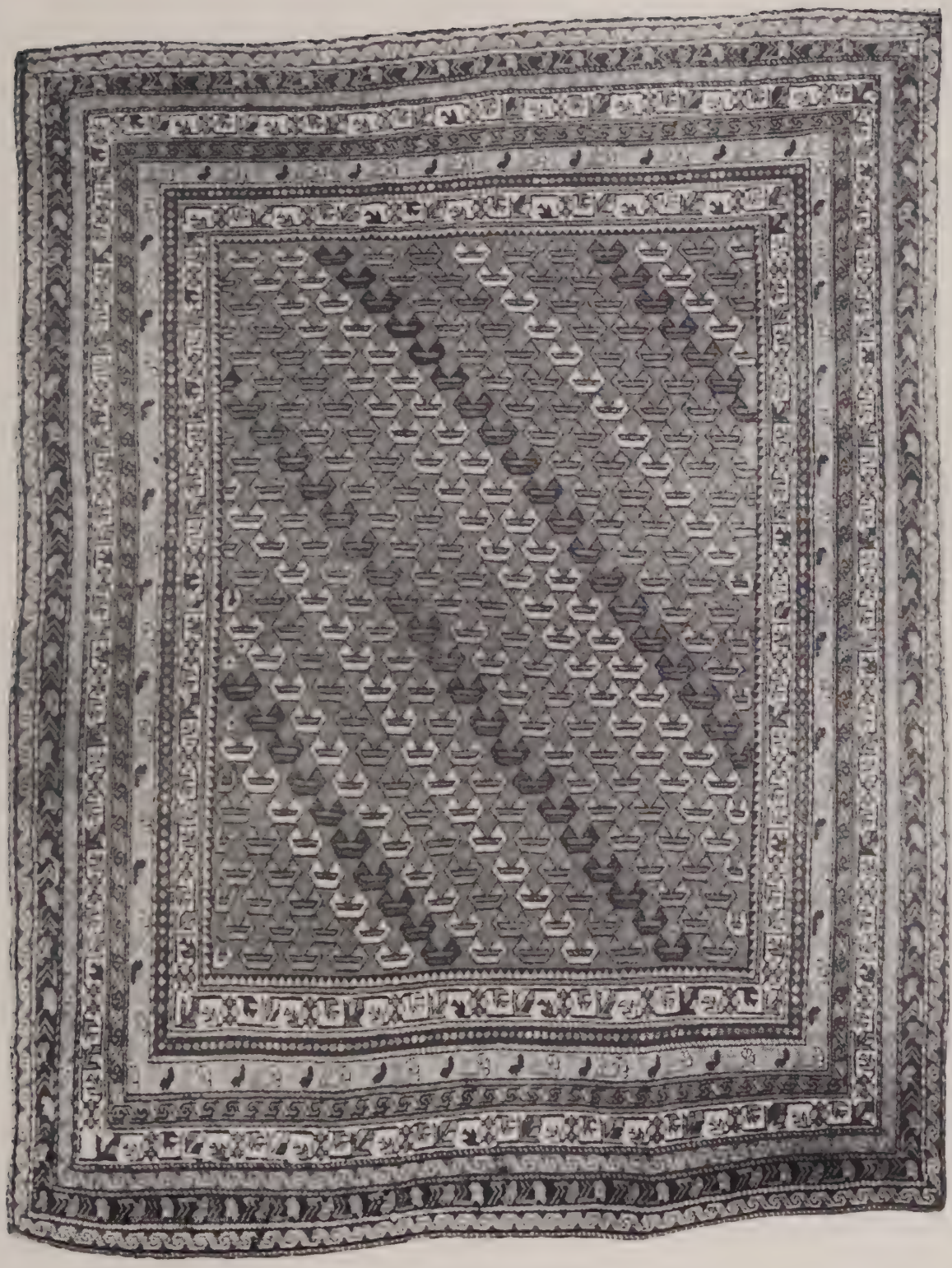
21. OLD KAZAK (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·15m x 1·11m

22. OLD SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·45m x 1·06m

23. ANTIQUE DAGESTAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·55m x 1·05m

24. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 1·97m x 1·08m

25. ANTIQUE DERBEND (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·68m x 1·12m



26. OLD ERIVAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·88m x 1·44m

27. OLD ERIVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·58m x 1·34m

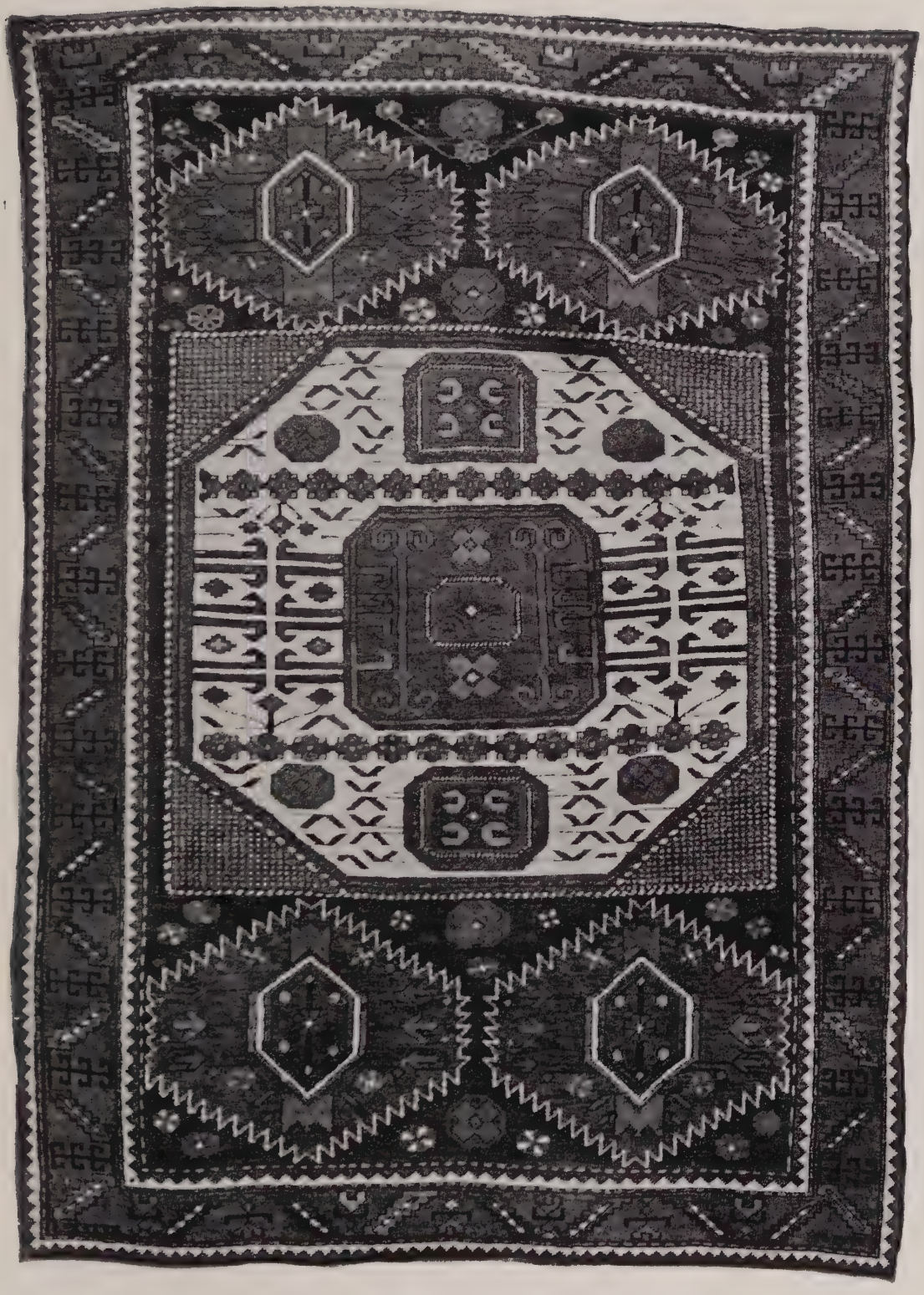
LEFT 28. OLD KARABAGH (CIRCA 1900) 3·60m x 0·95m

RIGHT 29. OLD KARABAGH (CIRCA 1900) 4·10m x 1·30m

30. OLD DERBEND (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·23m x 0·76m

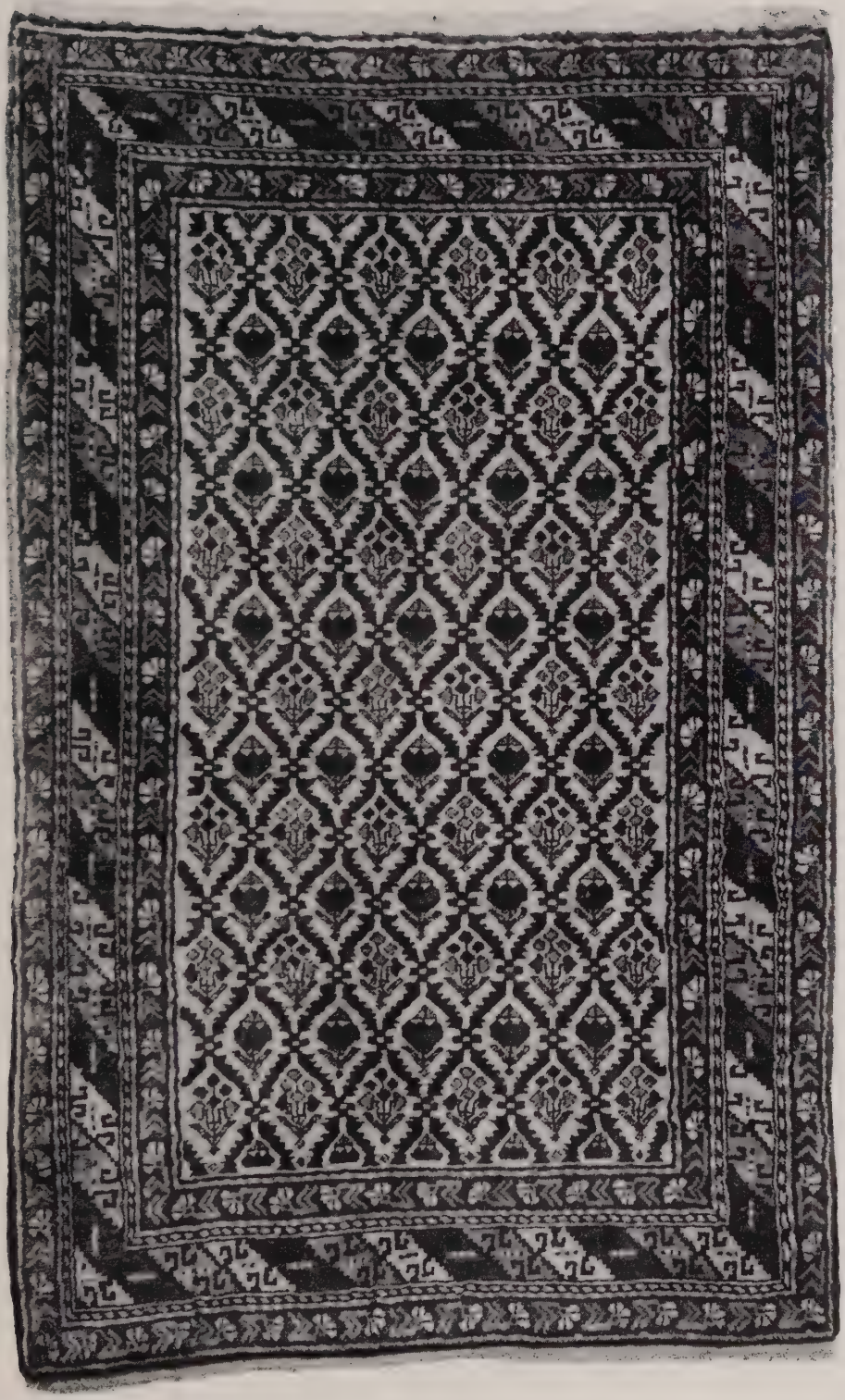
31. ANTIQUE DAGESTAN (DATED 1813) 1·62m x 1·14m

32. OLD SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·39m x 1·25m



33. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 2·05m x 1·46m

34. OLD KAZAK (DATED 1921) 2·90m x 1·72m



35. SHIRVAN (MID-20TH CENTURY) 1·54m x 0·95m

36. OLD KAZAK (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·11m x 1·21m

37. OLD DAGESTAN (DATED 1905) 1·80m x 1·33m

38. ANTIQUE SEJSHOUR (CIRCA 1850) 3·47m x 1·50m

39. OLD SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·47m x 1·12m

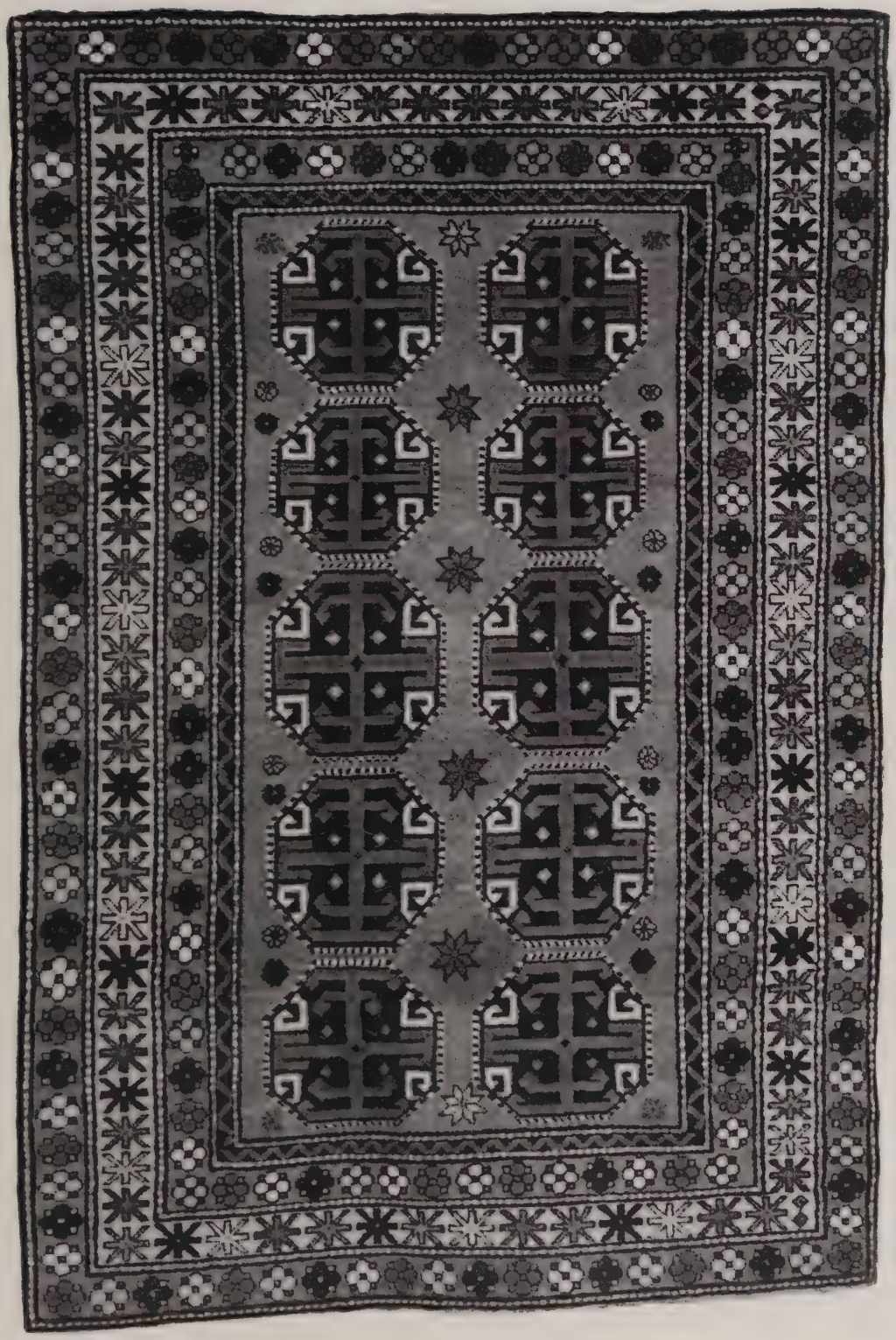
40. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 2·06m x 1·14m

41. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 2·54m x 1·42m

42. OLD ARMENIAN KAZAK (DATED 1926) 2·22m x 1·44m

43. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 3·02m x 1·42m

44. ANTIQUE DAGESTAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·39m x 1·00m



45. SHIRVAN (MID-20TH CENTURY) 1·50m x 1·00m

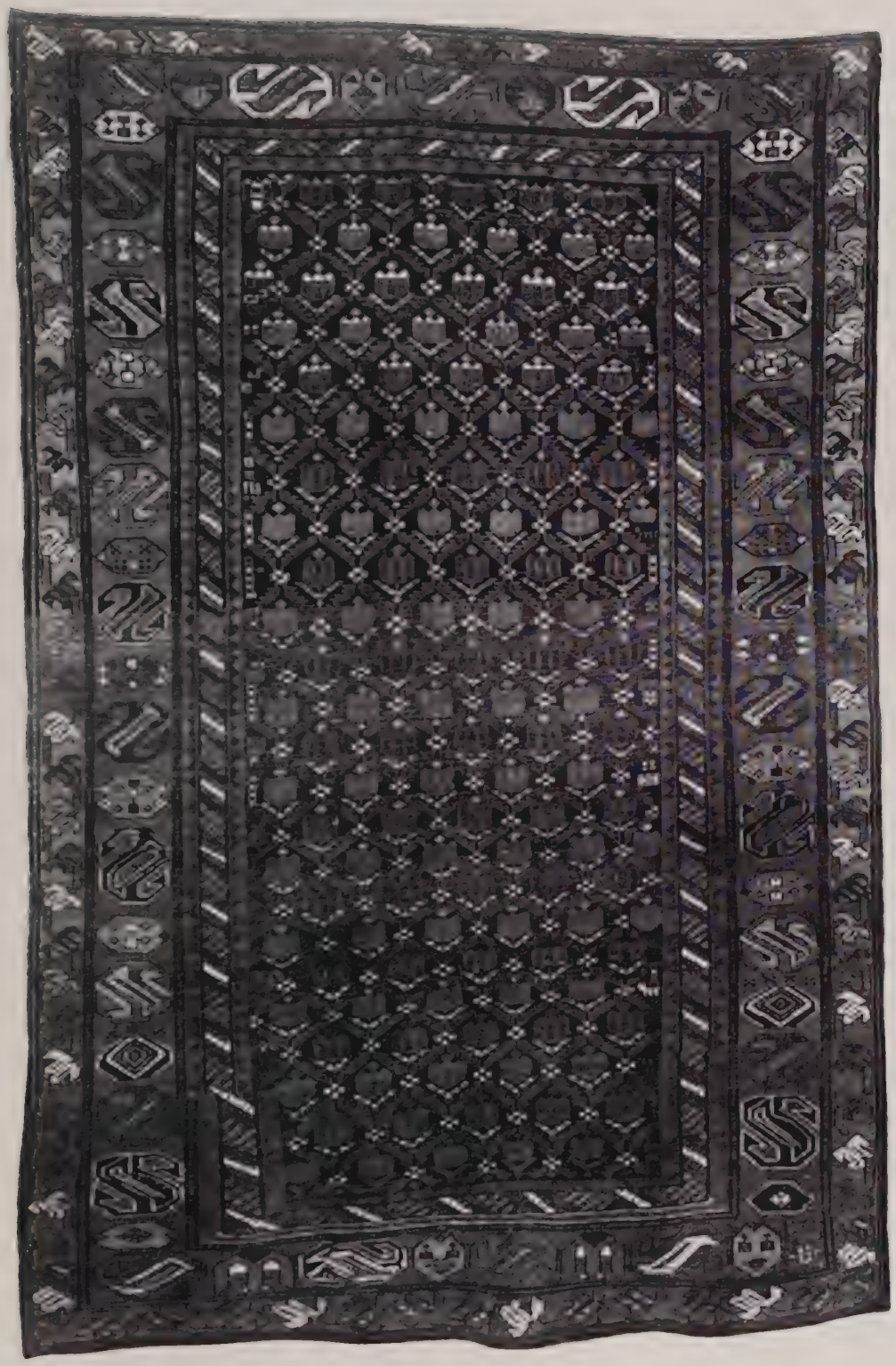
46. OLD KAZAK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·35m x 1·62m

47. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·83m x 1·18m

48. ANTIQUE KUBA (CIRCA 1750) 3·04m x 1·67m

49. OLD SHIRVAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·58m x 1·10m

50. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 3·05m x 1·22m



51. OLD ARMENIAN CHICHI (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·05m x 1·35m

52. OLD SHIRVAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·32m x 0·95m

53. OLD KUBA (DATED 1893) 3·50m x 1·05m

54. OLD DERBEND (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·98m x 1·32m

55. OLD DERBEND (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·57m x 1·73m

56. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 2·20m x 1·10m

57. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 3·20m x 1·13m

58. OLD KAZAK (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 4·09m x 0·91m

59. ANTIQUE SHIRVAN (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·44m x 1·19m

60. OLD SHIRVAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·37m x 1·00m

61. ANTIQUE DAGESTAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·36m x 1·00m

62. OLD SHIRVAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·97m x 1·25m

63. ANTIQUE KAZAK (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·35m x 1·02m

64. OLD GENDJE (CIRCA 1900) 3·85m x 1·27m

65. OLD DERBEND (CIRCA 1900) 4·90m x 2·13m

66. OLD DERBEND (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·50m x 1·00m

67. OLD KAZAK (CIRCA 1900) 3·83m x 1·93m

68. OLD SHIRVAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·93m x 1·52m

69. ANTIQUE BAKU (CIRCA 1850) 2·49m x 1·17m

70. OLD GENDJE (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·68m x 1·40m

The Tribal Rugs of South Persia

Rugs made by genuinely nomadic people possess certain unique qualities which distinguish them from all other types of Oriental carpet. Since it is usually necessary for the weaver, who is always a woman or young girl, to work on her rug in several different locations, the loom she uses is small, constructed to be easily packed on a camel or donkey, and of the primitive horizontal type. Nomadic rugs, therefore, are not often larger than 8′ x 6′, this being the maximum size necessary for the typical family tent. Moreover, although wool for the rugs is always in plentiful supply from the herds of the tribe, the vegetable dyes used in colouring them need to be specially prepared at each stopping place, employing the plants, insects, fruits and mineral constituents which the weaver is able to gather from her immediate desert environment. Often, therefore, there are surprising changes of colour (known as 'abrach') in the old tribal works, indicating the point in the knotting of a rug when the weaver had to dye a batch of wool after the tribal chiefs had chosen fresh pasturage for their sheep.

The unsettled existence, the fierce independence of the tribe from its host country, the natural pride and originality of the nomadic character and the unbroken traditions of tribal art and culture all contribute to that extraordinary individuality of each tribal rug which is the essence of their appeal to the collector. The weaver works entirely from memory and inspiration, transferring patterns taught her by her mother and embellished to the extent of her own creativity directly on to the loom, in colours traditional to her tribe and available from her immediate environment. Superstition, spontaneous emotion, the heritage and present position of her family and tribe, the use for which her work is intended, even the weather itself can all have a direct influence upon the eventual appearance of the nomadic rug, while the individual skill and imagination of the weaver is the determining factor in the rug's success or otherwise as a work of tribal art. That the genuine nomadic rugs of the South Persian tribes should be objects of immense fascination and appeal is, therefore, hardly surprising; that many of them also possess an intrinsic quality of dyes, wools, general designs and excellence of weave which compares favourably with virtually any other type of Oriental carpet is an added bonus to the collector of these most popular and sought-after pieces.

Of the great rug-making tribes of Asia, those of the Southern provinces of Persia have gained a renown for the beauty of their rugs which is almost unrivalled—only the Turkoman nomads of the Russian Steppe assume a similar importance in the development of the tribal rug. Yet, while the appeal of the old Turkomans lies as much in their cultural significance as it does in their highly subtle and rather elusive aesthetic qualities, the South Persian tribal rugs are prized above all others for the superb variety of their designs, for their glowing and richly contrasted dye shades and for their soft and silky wool—in other words, such rugs appeal directly by their appearance which is always immediately striking and enduringly satisfying.

The two great tribes of South Persia are the Afshari from the province of Kirman and the Quashgai of Fars province, in the vicinity of Shiraz. Each of these major tribes was (and, to a lesser extent, still is) composed of a large number of sub-tribes, each of these being further divided into family groups of a few tents each, one family unit to each tent, each with its own number of sheep, goats, horses, camels and dogs. The wealth of a family or a sub-tribe was always measured by the number of its sheep, for the sheep is the raison d'etre of the nomadic existence, and the source of almost all the tribe's comforts and necessities.

THE AFSHAR

Forcefully rehabilitated in the Kirman district from their territories in Azerbaijan by Shah Tahmasp in the 16th Century, the Afshar tribe occupy a large area of the city of Kirman, a people of Turkish descent surrounded by purely Persian towns and villages. In the last century they lived a completely nomadic existence, occupying the black goat's hair tents which, perfectly suited to the changing climate of Southern Persia, have remained unchanged for centuries.

The rugs they made show a unique mixture of influences and traditions in their designs, combined with a superb sense of colour which makes them very pleasing to the contemporary eye. The pile is tied in the Turkish knot, indicating the early descent of the tribe from North West Asian stock, on warps and wefts of wool, usually a single weft between each row of knots.

The designs are geometric, a sure indication of the direct transference of a design from the head of the weaver to the loom, without resource to drawn designs, and are generally floral in character—large floral bunches, radiating flower heads, stylized floral trellises—or else they employ the boteh motif in an allover arrangement and an abstracted interpretation which is always unmistakeably Afshari in concept. A fondness for animal and bird motifs, shown to an even greater extent in the tribal rugs of Fars, is also apparent.

Colours, as mentioned previously, are rich and vely, the dyestuffs of the Afshari being among the est in Persia. Reds and blues are favoured for the round colours, although a few rare works (see No. 1) display white fields of undyed wool. White is otherwise used with great restraint, particularly in the order areas. These superb colours, combined with n impressively finely knotted pile and the springy, ustrous wool which is characteristic of the old rugs nake Afshars highly-prized examples of nomadic xpertise. The splendid range of beautiful and unsual designs created from the colours and wool of he Afshars also place them among the most decorave and striking rugs knotted during the past 150 ears, as the vividly contrasted examples here exibited admirably demonstrate (see Nos. 72, 73, 74, 5 and 78).

A particularly fine type of Afshar was knotted by sub-group of the tribe in the Niris area, further to he South than the main district of the race. No. 79 provides an example of this rare and highly-favoured rigin, in the type of very intricate repeated design een in only a few of the surviving works from the istrict.

Exhibit No. 80 provides an exceptional example of very rare form of Afshari flat-weave, made with the oumac stitch associated with certain Caucasian textles. The wonderful clarity of the design, the extraordinary vividness of the colours, particularly the hite of the borders, and the very fine weave all ombine to make this type of flat-weave among the ost valuable and admired of the East.

HE QUASHGAI

Greater in numbers, more prosperous, more powerul and more famous than the Afshari is the huge Quashgai tribe of Fars, the Southern province of ersia with its central town of Shiraz. Like the fshars, the Quashgai are also descended from urkish stock, using (in the old rugs only) the Turkish r symmetrical knot as an indication of their descent.

So large is the tribe, and so pervasive its influence the culture of the Fars province, that many rugs nd weavings allocated the classification 'Quashgai' re in fact the products of settled village communities the area, imitating or interpreting the true omadic style of the genuine Quashgai pieces, which re both scarce and in tremendous demand today. he name 'Shiraz' is often given to rugs of a partiular appearance and quality which cannot be more ccurately designated to one of the villages, sub-tribes the Quashgai or one of the Arab tribes who also make rugs in the Fars district.

The authentic Quashgai rug is perhaps the most consistently outstanding of all nomadic weaves, and has gained for itself a world-wide reputation among collectors for the beauty of its colouring, the rich imagination of its designs and the superb quality of its long-fibred and highly lustrous wool. Rug No. 71 in this exhibition is a definitive example of the weave at its height, in an unusually large size for an old tribal work, made, it should be remembered, on the transportable horizontal loom.

The designs of Quashgais and other rugs from the environs (mainly North) of Shiraz are extremely varied, with pole medallions, large floral palmettes, vertical meander or boteh stripes, highly naturalistic lion motifs, Tree of Life emblems and the unmistakeable love of stylized animal and bird forms being perhaps the most characteristic features.

The colours are rather richer and more lively than those of the Afshars, with shades of red and blue being contrasted harmoniously with each other, and a superb yellow obtained from the scentless weld flower providing a secondary highlighting colour in some of the finest pieces. As with all tribal works from Southern Persia, the vegetable dyes of the desert are used by the Quashgai with consummate skill, producing striking and cheerful effects found in virtually no other type of Oriental rug.

Knotted in wool, occasionally with goat's hair warps, two weft threads giving tremendous stability and durability, the Quashgai rugs have a marvellously glossy pile, this being most apparent in the older works preserved in good condition. The kelim webs are often attractively decorated, the same motivations of family and tribal pride applying to the nomadic Quashgai as much as to the Afshari (or Turkoman). The period works were made almost exclusively for personal use in the encampment, and even today the Quashgai remain one of the few nomadic peoples to knot rugs in the traditional manner with that degree of care and artistry which indicates a non-commercial and individualistic commitment to the work in question.

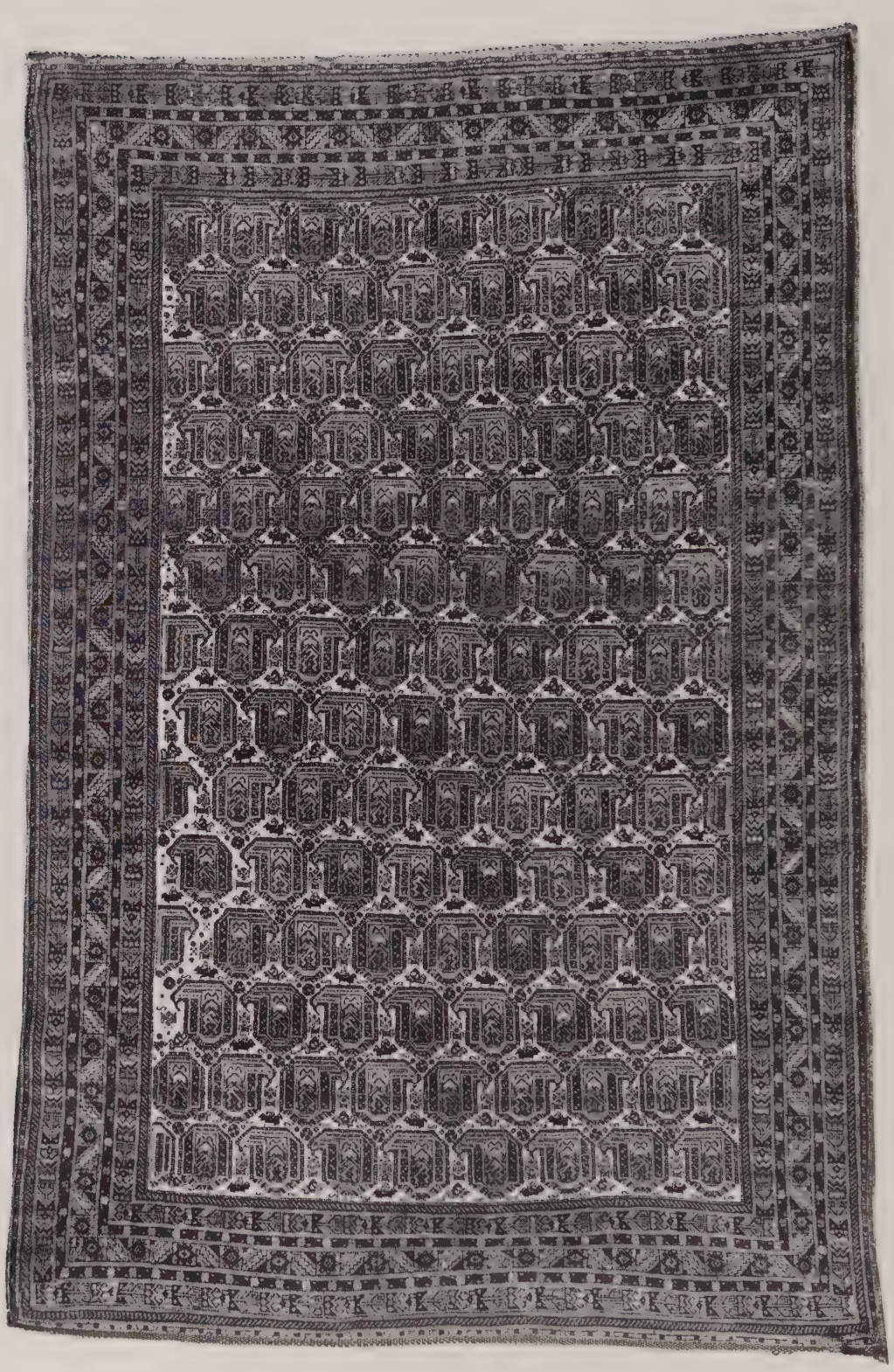
Rare and coveted as Quashgais are, two fine examples are included here—the superb No. 71 already mentioned, and the slightly less old No. 76. Also, two saddlebags—Nos. 82 and 83—knotted by nomads of the Shiraz region, probably sub-groups of the Quashgai tribe, have been selected to show some of the diversity of design and usage found in the genuine old knotted works of the district.

71. ANTIQUE QUASHGAI (MID-19TH CENTURY) 3·08m x 1·67m

72. OLD AFSHAR (CIRCA 1900) 2·05m x 1·67m

73. ANTIQUE AFSHAR (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·79m x 1·36m

74. ANTIQUE AFSHAR (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·64m x 1·16m



75. OLD AFSHAR (CIRCA 1900) 2·52m x 1·63m

76. OLD QUASHGAI (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·78m x 1·00m

77. OLD SHIRAZ (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·95m x 1·57m

78. ANTIQUE AFSHAR (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·53m x 1·23m

79. ANTIQUE NIRIS (CIRCA 1850) 2·25m x 1·50m

80. ANTIQUE AFSHAR KELIM (CIRCA 1850) 2·22m x 1·35m

81. ANTIQUE AFSHAR (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·53m x 1·23m

82. OLD SHIRAZ BAG (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·30m x 0·65m

83. OLD SHIRAZ BAG (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·23m x 0·62m

The Rugs of the Belouchi

Although one of the largest of all the Asian nomadic tribes, distributed over a vast area from the northern borders of Persia with Russia, down along the entire Afghan-Persian border on both sides, into the southern provinces of East Persia and across the Persian-Pakistan border into Belouchistan itself, very little information on the nomads of the Belouchi tribe is available. Over the past 100 years, many of the nomads have settled in Persian and Afghani villages, and have become more or less integrated into the local communities, although continuing to maintain certain of the old tribal traditions, particularly in terms of rug making. Of the Belouchi who have remained nomadic or semi-nomadic in their existence, a self-imposed secrecy and elusiveness has prevented any in-depth research into their lifestyles and, as with the Turkoman tribes of the Russian Steppe, the most concrete evidence we have of the Belouchi character is to be found in their rugs, weavings and the various textiles which are an essential part of their migratory existence.

The Belouchi are closer in terms of both descent and culture to the original Turkoman tribes than they are to the various peoples they live amongst. The racial melting-pot of Afghanistan may perhaps be the source of this relationship, with intermarriage, conquest and the assimilation of one tribe or group by another breaking down the ethnic barriers which were once so rigid. The Belouchi rugs, however, remain quite different from any others, and are usually easily recognisable as a result.

Made mostly by the Belouchi of Persia and Western Afghanistan, they are amongst the simplest and most primitive of all Oriental rugs, possessing, in the best examples, a direct, unsophisticated force and a certain uncomplicated charm which is quite unique. While the Belouchi rugs from the village settlements often possess a fineness of weave and a relative precision of design and colouring which mirrors the stable environment from which they come (and to some extent, the demands of the merchants in the bazaars), the true nomadic Belouch will usually conjure up the image of a woman weaver working entirely from intuition, completely cut off from the currents and fashions of the world, knowing only what she sees about her and what she has learnt in the short and arduous travels of her family in constant search of fresh pasturage. Such rugs, often in the prayer design, are frequently very dark in colouring, providing a rest from the wearing sun of the East Persian desert. They are loosely knotted in the thick, marvellously lustrous wool of the Belouchi sheep and their designs are age-old and unchanged—the stylized Tree of Life, the hands of Fatima in the spandrels, the simple angular vine meander border, perhaps small animal and human figures knotted in at random, the weaver's husband, the dogs which protect the sheep, the goats which provide the hair for their black, cramped tents. The very poverty of existence of the nomadic Belouchi gives to their rugs an integrity and commitment which, however lacking in refinement or elegance, possesses the depth and passion of all true primitive tribal art.

The reputation of the old Belouchi tribes as raiders and plunderers is reflected in the extraordinary range of designs found in their rugs : motifs, border designs, mihrab shapes, spandrel ornaments, guls—all are plagiarized openly from other cultures the Belouchi have encountered in their travels, giving an energetic variety of design to their rugs which is uncommon among nomadic peoples. Yet every borrowed motif or design is adapted immediately with a style which is uniquely Belouchi in character : the strict geometry of the drawing, the simple outlines of each area or segment of the rug's composition, the incorporation of alien motifs into general design schemes which are found in no other rugs save those of this ubiquitous tribe.

Two main colour schemes occur in the old Belouchis; in those from the late 19th Century on, the colours grew more various. A characteristic arrangement displays a camel-brown central field or mihrab, with red, dark brown and blue being employed for the Tree of Life figure, and in the borders. If the camel brown was not used, colours were generally much darker : purples, deep reds, almost black indigos, black itself and various dark browns; a superb purple sheen can occasionally be created over the entire rug by a clever balance of these colours. White, sometimes knotted in cotton to make it even more startling, is often used sparsely in a border stripe in these dark Belouchis, creating a termendously dramatic contrast which is virtually unique to such rugs.

In weave, Belouchis range from the thick, coarse rugs of the most remote mountain settlements on the Afghan border to the extremly fine works made by the Belouchis of the Khorassan district, and known in the trade today as 'Meshed Belouchis'. The warps and wefts are nearly always of wool in the old works, with wool and a sprinkling of cotton for the pile, motifs occasionally being highlighted in silk in dowry rugs.

The vast majority of Belouchis are small in size—generally prayer rugs (namazliks), small tent rugs and saddlebags (such as Nos. 95 & 96) and, like the rugs

of the Turkoman, they had a strictly functional purpose. Thus, in the older Belouchi namazliks one will often find a degree of wear in the prayer field caused by the five-times daily obeisance towards Mecca of its devout owner. Larger carpets (Nos. 91, 92 & 93 are superb examples) are far less common, the collapsible horizontal looms of the weavers being too narrow to accommodate such works. Those that exist will often be found as two strips stitched together down the centre. They were presumably made to decorate the floors of the larger tents, usually belonging to tribal chiefs and dignatories. The fineness of the weave and the usually superb quality of their wool adds further weight to this hypothesis.

The Belouchis are one of the few of the ancient nomadic peoples to survive today, although more and more are settling in the towns and villages of Persia. The rugs they now produce, although occasionally of great fineness and in the traditional designs of the tribe, are generally made entirely for sale, with only a few pieces being held back for the family's own use. It is, therefore, only the older examples which display that authenticity of purpose and the excellence engendered by family and tribal pride which make them worthy of the collector's attention. In them, we see a highly individual creative energy at work, aided and abetted by the superb vegetable dyes at the tribe's disposal and that thick, glossy wool which—even in the most loosely knotted example—imparts a deep richness to the colours which no amount of chemical washing or artificial treatment could ever hope to achieve. And since even the oldest and most exquisite Belouchis are generally available at most reasonable prices, they have become one of the most sought-after genres among collectors of genuine nomadic rugs, possessing all the charm, cultural interest and the intrinsic quality of authentic tribal art for which the more expensive Turkomans, Quashgais and Afshars are justifiably renowned.

84. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·60m x 0·95m

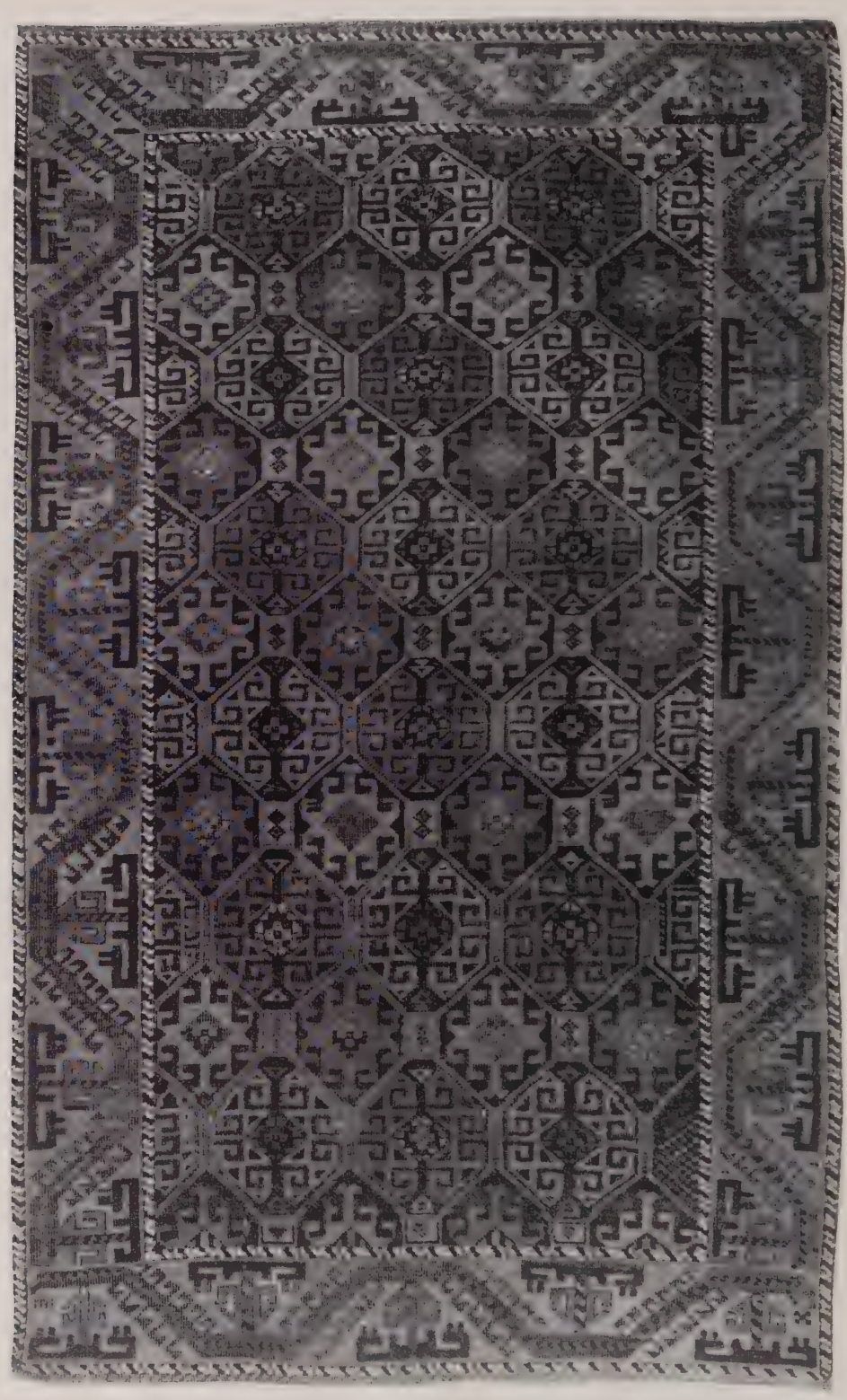
85. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·17m x 0·95m

86. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·30m x 0·75m

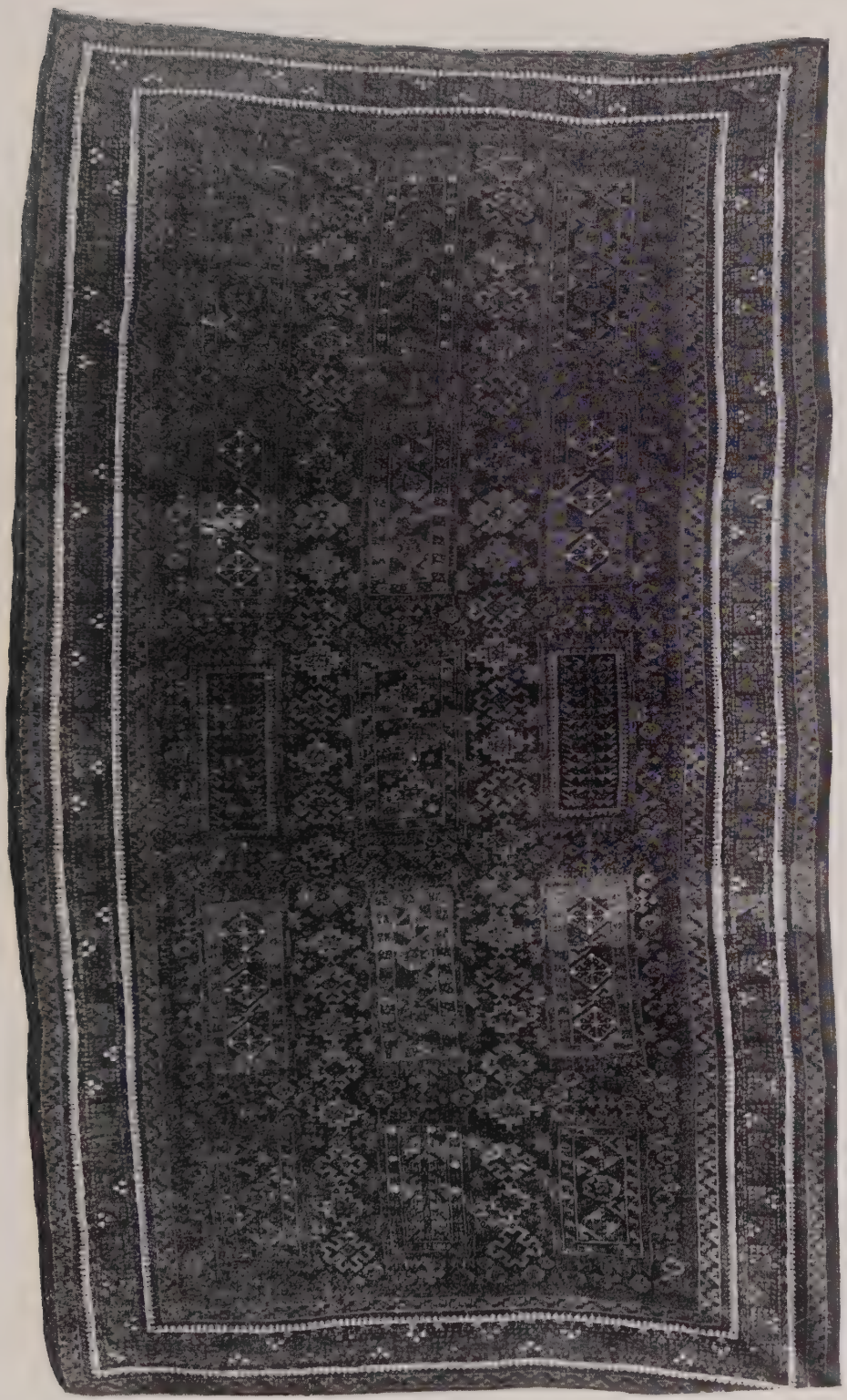
87. ANTIQUE BELOUCH (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·55m x 0·85m

88. OLD BELOUCH (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·19m x 0·90m

89. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·72m x 1·00m

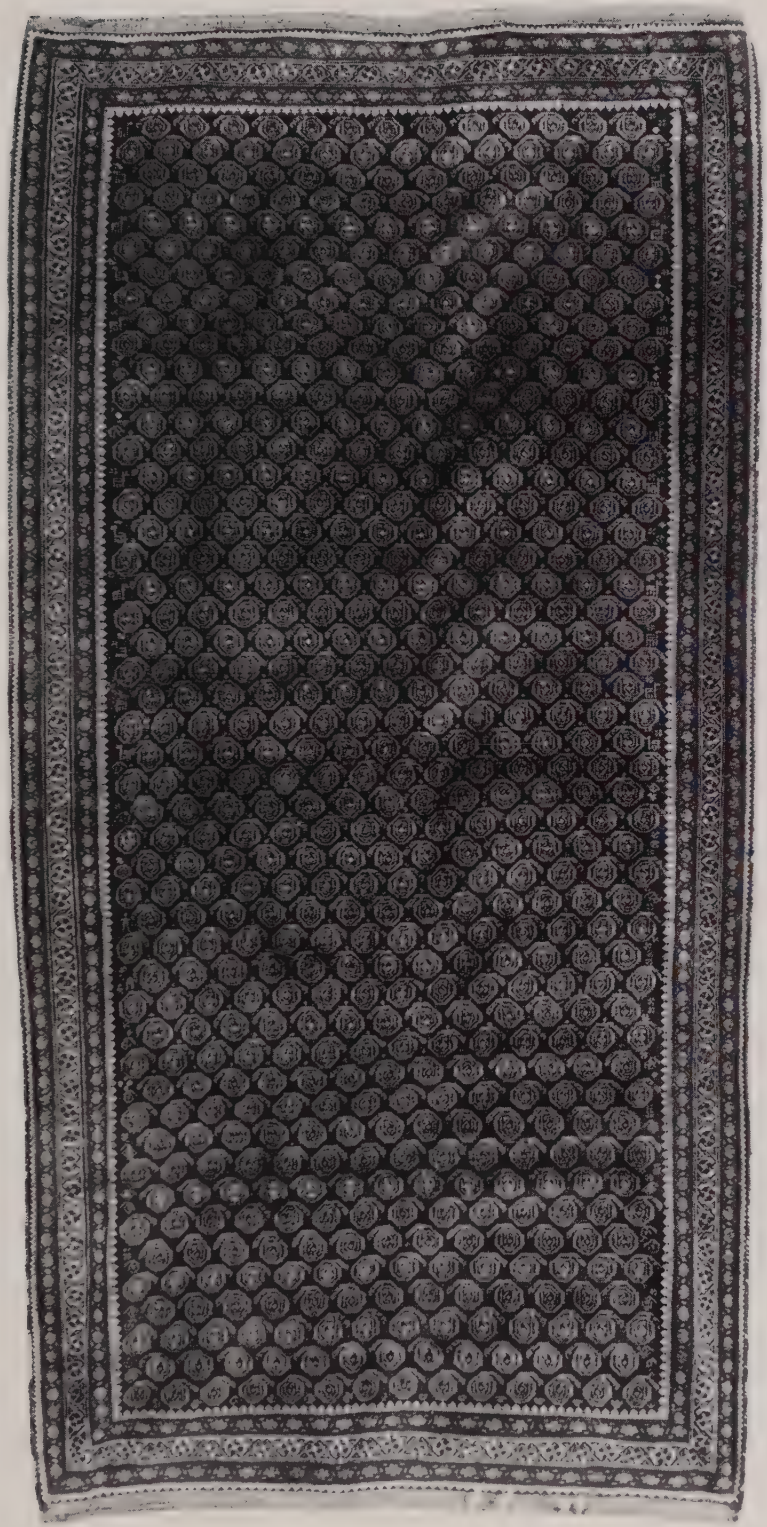


90. ANTIQUE BELOUCH (CIRCA 1850) 1·53m x 0·92m



91. OLD BELOUCH (CIRCA 1900) 2·95m x 1·76m

92. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·47m x 1·09m



93. OLD BELOUCH (CIRCA 1900) 2·65m x 1·35m

94. OLD BELOUCH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·86m x 1·06m

95. OLD BELOUCH BAG (CIRCA 1900) 1·40m x 0·65m

96. OLD BELOUCH BAG (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·50m x 0·70m

Carpets and Rugs of the Persian Villages

The village rugs of Persia provide the balance—both technically and aesthetically—between the two extremes of Persian carpet making : the sophisticated floral carpets of the urban manufactories and the simple geometric artistry of the nomad weaver.

Often made by settled communities of once-nomadic people, many village rugs tend more to the rectilinear tribal style than to the elegantly-curving designs of the towns, yet the influence of the outside world, of the taste of bazaars and even of foreign collectors and merchants, has given to the village rug a constantly changing range of design and colour schemes which is quite different to the static aesthetic of the enclosed and remote tribal culture. In fact, several Persian villages produced rugs and carpets during the latter half of the 19th Century which are comparable in every way to the products of the great towns—such rugs were usually commissioned by the urban workshops, and were knotted in accordance with design charts supplied by them. Sarouk and Heriz were major village knotting areas patronised by the town merchants, yet it is apparent from the several examples shown here that the villagers brought their own unique interpretations to the graceful designs of the manufactories, substituting the straight line for the curve as they had been traditionallly taught, and producing a hybrid style of carpet design which, when successful, was wonderfully effective.

The lives of the Persian villagers, like the rugs they made, lay halfway between the migratory existence of nomads and the more highly developed world of town dwellers. Inhabiting a permanent, though often very small and sparsely furnished, home made of wood and caked mud, depending largely on agriculture, animal rearing and rug making for their income, the typical Persian village family was forced more and more away from the hard yet simple life of the nomad towards the more commercially-orientated pressures of the town in order to survive. In the period around the beginning of this century from which most of the village rugs in this exhibition come, this cultural shift was just beginning, producing a defined style of village weaving which has since been slowly eroded as the nomadic descent of these communities was gradually submerged beneath the demands and influences of the prosperous towns.

An indication of this cultural change was provided by the adoption of the upright or vertical loom in preference to the horizontal loom of the nomads. Although village weavers in certain areas—particularly in Fars and Khorassan, where the nomadic origins of the weavers were most pronounced—continued (and in some cases still continue) to use the flat loom, in the vast majority of Persian villages i was replaced by the more permanent upright loom o the town workshops. This enabled the weavers t make larger and more finely knotted works, as wel as enabling them to work more closely from drawi designs, rather than simply transferring the desig directly from their memory on to the loom.

Following in the wake of the vertical loom came materials—wool, and, later, cotton for the foundation threads—from the bazaars, sometimes already dyed the drawn designs of the town workshops, already mentioned; and, most importantly, the possibility o making carpets of a size quite unsuited to the weaver's own home, and, therefore, made entirely for sale usually in the local bazaar. The making of carpets for sale, quite different to the entirely domestic purpose of the old tribal rugs, led to a proliferation of new designs and colour schemes, of various qualities of weaves and materials, which had both good and bad effects. The bad effects are by now well known—the use of cheap aniline dyes, lazy knotting techniques, poor quality wool, repetitive and unimaginative designs, and poor, European-influenced colour-schemes, all contributed to the low reputation of Persian village rugs during the middle years of this century.

In the period immediately prior to this, however, the weavers of the villages brought a new life and imagination to the rug made specifically for sale which contributed enormously to the general re-surgence of the Persian carpet in the latter years of the 19th Century. The knotting skills of these settled nomads were combined with an energetic experimentation in design and colour which produced many rugs of outstanding merit—highly original, authentically-made and employing the old techniques of dyeing and knotting, such rugs are the joy of collectors, providing a more plentiful source of traditional Persian weaving than the rugs of the nomads, usually at much lower price-levels than the more valuable, though not always more attractive, urban works.

For this exhibition, we have selected rugs and carpets from the main village centres of Persia which we believe effectively illustrate the charm and the quality of the old rural rugs. Individual character, an expression of the weaver's own personality and the usage of traditional techniques are here found combined with the new freedoms generated by outside interests which distinguished the Persian village carpet from the turn of the Century. As more and more connoisseurs turn to these rugs as genuine examples of the Persian carpet-makers art, this col-

ction of outstanding pieces provides a superb ntroduction to the village knotting districts of Persia, anging from the magnificent carpets and rugs of arouk to the huge variety of sizes, designs and olourings associated with the Hamadan district. The ollowing brief notes provide an outline to the haracteristics of the village rugs of each provenance lustrated in the exhibition.

ERIZ

Heriz is the centre of a small group of villages ocated deep in the mountains to the East of Tabriz n Azerbaijan—a remote and primitive community vho were to achieve world renown at the end of he last Century for the unique and highly attractive arpets they knotted under the encouragement and atronage of the Tabrizi merchants.

These gentlemen, to whose energetic mercantile mbition and imagination the carpet enthusiast owes o much, were responsible for introducing the weavers f Heriz to the new designs and styles being developed n the great Tabriz manufactories. The villagers, who ad made rugs for perhaps centuries in the geometric malgam of Persian and Caucasian design which haracterizes the old rugs of Azerbaijan, inevitably nterpreted the flowing floral splendour of the Tabriz esigns in their own traditional geometric manner, nd the result was a design of carpet which has emained unique to the Heriz district since, and vhich possesses a quintessential village appearance of reat charm and appeal.

Knotting the carpets in the excellent wool of their wn flocks, using dyes prepared in the old manner of he district, with the superb earthy shades almost nique to the area, the villagers knotted large carpets n a very strong, honest weave (see Nos 126 and 127) nd a few exquisite silk rugs, an example of which is ncluded later in this exhibition (see No. 175). In the arpets, apart from the angular depiction of central nedallion, leaf forms, corner scrolls and borders, dentification is made easy by the colours : a wonder- ul light brick red, sometimes shaded to copper, is haracteristic, usually combined with soft green, ellow, natural undyed wool, dark and light blue nd other gradations of madder reds and browns. t is said that these colours reflect the mountain andscape from which the carpets originate. No. 103 ere is an exceptional example of the old Heriz nanner at its most appealing, superbly made in the ather thick, glossy wool which is a feature of the best ieces.

IAMADAN

The extensive district of villages, settlements and semi-nomadic tribes surrounding the West Persian town of Hamadan was responsible for producing the greatest number of rural carpets, rugs and runners during the great period of village weaving at the end of the last century.

The people of this area are of Turkish extraction, and use the Turkish knot, almost invariably on the upright loom. Because the Hamadan district is relatively close to the great and ancient cities of Central Persia, and because of a long tradition of carpet making in the district, the rugs from here show a confidence and a willingness to experiment with new styles and colours which have made them virtually the definition of village knotting, embodying all those aspects (both good and bad) which the term 'village weave' implies.

In the finest pieces (Nos. 119 and 120 are excellent large works, No. 107 an exceptional Hamadan rug), the weave is very firm, knotted in handspun yarn, the pile cut high, the unusual single weft producing a speckled appearance on the back which is unmistakeable. Designs are usually simple and direct, clearly outlined, with borders showing a distinct relationship with both certain rugs from the Caucasus, and the nomadic rugs of South Persia, particularly those of the Afshari. Light colours are much used, with a warm camel colour being characteristic in the old pieces, and the use of ivory undyed wool being distinctive. Other rugs in this exhibition (see Nos. 101, 113, 117, 122, 123 and 125) illustrate various different facets of the Hamadan weave, and each has been selected as demonstrating the honesty and rugged charm of the older works, before certain malpractices and lack of imagination affected the high reputation of the Hamadan rug in the middle years of this Century.

Tafrish (see Nos. 109 and 116) is the name given to a particularly fine version of the old Hamadan weave. Although often subdued in colouring, the quality of materials, dyes and workmanship in these rugs is usually quite outstanding.

Malayer (see No. 129) is another village in the Hamadan district, producing a superior version of the basic Hamadan rug.

SENNEH

To the North of Hamadan, the village of Senneh lies in the centre of a Kurdish community, much of it truly nomadic. (Rug No. 110 shows a genuine tribal rug from the district, in thick wool and rich colouring, quite different from the village rugs associated with the area).

The weavers of Senneh itself have for long been renowned as the most skilful and artistic of all Persian village weavers, being the makers of a few very rare and valuable rugs of extraordinary fineness, often knotted on silk warps, in the Herati pattern. They were tied in the Turkish knot, although paradoxically the village has given its name to the Persian or Senneh knot. A later form of these superb rugs, in the same design, yet not so remarkably fine, has come to be called the Senneh Hamadan (see No. 121). The rare horse blanket, No. 104, is an example both of a fine Senneh weave and the semi-nomadic background to the villagers, an aspect often neglected by connoisseurs.

The weavers of Senneh were also renowned throughout the East as the creators of the finest of all kelims. Nos. 106 and 131 provide an indication of the marvellous inventiveness and expertise of the kelim weavers, these works being made primarily for decorative purposes, rather than as objects of every day use. The fineness of a kelim can be evaluated by examining the slits between one colour and the next—the smaller the slit, the finer the kelim.

BIDJAR

Close to Senneh is the group of forty or so villages who knot the unmistakeable Bidjar weave—their carpets possess such a dense and thick pile bound by two very thick wefts between each row of knots that they can hardly be folded. This makes them among the hardest-wearing of all hand-knotted carpets, as well as being extremely individual in 'handle' and appearance. Bidjars are also renowned for their outstanding vegetable colours, and for the direct, unpolished simplicity of their designs. No. 108 is a fine example of this important type.

KARADJA

Lying close to the Caucasian border, North of Tabriz, the village of Karadja produced a few superb rugs and, particularly, runners around the turn of the Century. Examples of the weave are rare, and we are proud to have two exceptional pieces in the exhibition collection (Nos. 102 and 112). The influence of the Caucasus is strong in both design and colouring, yet the motifs are generally more closely worked and, on the whole, smaller than in Caucasian pieces. The wool is thick and wonderfully glossy, tied in the Turkish knot to produce a dense and immensely durable pile. The richness of the colours, and the dramatic use of white undyed wool owes much to the traditions of Caucasian design. During this Century production in Karadja declined sharply, and these last surviving old works are in tremendous demand today.

SAROUK

With the exception of the extremely rare Senneh rugs, the carpets and rugs of Sarouk in Central Persia represent the finest and most valuable of all village weaves. Apart from the delightful angularity of their designs, they are closer in almost every respect to the great town works of Kashan, Isphahan, Tabriz and Kirman than they are to the traditional village rugs of, say, the Hamadan district.

Very finely knotted in magnificent wool, usually on a warp and weft of cotton, with a tightly-cut pile, their designs stand out with all the elegance and clarity traditionally associated with the best urban works. The closeness of the knotting and the very short pile also allowed an intricacy of design and detail which was most unusual in village works—variations of the classical medallion design are the most frequently-encountered, these usually knotted from design cartoons supplied by urban manufactories. Occasional 'mistakes' in design are not uncommon in the older Sarouks, the villagers not having then mastered the art of working from a set design (see No. 97, a delightful example of this characteristic).

Colours are clear and rich, the master dyers of the village producing superb hues from the wide range of vegetable, animal and mineral dyes available to them—the indigo blues are especially good, as are the madder reds, often displayed on cream-coloured grounds.

The exhibits of the Sarouk weave in this collection demonstrate clearly the tremendous superiority in terms of fineness, elegance of design and delicacy of colouring which these rugs have over virtually all other village productions. Particular attention is drawn to No. 100, a magnificent antique Sarouk carpet of the highest calibre, as well as Nos. 97, 98, 105 and 115, each an example of a different facet of this most prized of Persian village weaves.

HERAT

Rug No. 118 is something of a mystery. In terms of design, weave and colouring it should be classified without question as a Herat. Herats were made from the 16th Century until the end of Nadir Shah's reign in the 18th Century in, presumably, the Khorassan province of North East Persia, and were marketed in the then capital of East Persia, Herat (now in Afghanistan). They were among the most beautiful of early Persian carpets and today are both extremely rare and very valuable, exemplifying as they do one of the highest points of the Persian Golden Era and

reating the famous Herati design which is found ater in so many rugs and carpets from both Persia nd the border villages of the Caucasus. The only oint of hesitancy in classifying exhibit No.118 as an Herat is its immaculate condition—since genuine Herats have not been made since the 18th Century, ne would expect a rug from this provenance to show degree of wear which is nowhere apparent in the ork in question. A certain brittleness in the pile, owever, suggests the rug has been stored for a onsiderable time, and it is just possible it might have een maintained in perfect condition for well over century. We thus suggest the Herat classification or this superb rug, and recommend our clients to xamine the piece and draw their own conclusions bout its provenance and age.

MAHAL

This is a name given to the thick, durable carpets nade in the region of Sultanabad (Arak) and in- ended for the everyday use of local dignitaries and nerchants. They possess an honest charm which is nmistakeably a product of village or cottage rug naking. No. 124 is an example of the traditional Mahal, in the easily-recognisable weave characteristic of the area.

BAKTHIAR

Rugs and carpets known as Bakthiar are named fter one of the largest of the old Persian nomadic ribes, the Bakthiari, who have long since settled in a arge district to the West and South-West of Ispha- an. The numerous villages of this district who knot he Bakthiar rugs are all that remains of the original tribe, integrated through marriage and commerce with the indigenous settled population of the area. The carpets they made in these villages are highly individual—usually a thick, medium weave was employed, with bold designs of tree forms, allover panels or large medallion emblems being worked in very strong, often earthy colours. Both striking and extremely durable, the authentic old Bakthiars (see Nos. 111, 130, outstanding examples both) are among the most individual of village weaves, and are much admired by connoisseurs. No. 114 shows a finer, more closely-clipped type of these rugs, in magnificent vegetable colours, the yellows being particularly outstanding.

ABADEH

A small village between Isphahan and Shiraz, Abadeh has reflected the overriding influences of the nomads in this area in rugs which are based very closely on Afshari and Quashgai designs. More finely knotted than the usual tribal rug, Abadehs are among the best of the Persian village weaves. Rug No. 99 displays the most renowned of Abadeh designs, the allover Zelli Sultan vase arrangement. This requires a very fine weave to bring out the superb detail of its complex floral arrangement. Bird motifs can be noticed worked subtly into the vase design. This rug —elegant, rich in colour, made with great skill, yet possessing all the individuality and close links with tribal culture which characterize the best village works—provides a suitable conclusion to this group of exhibits which explore the many aspects of the major period of Persian village rug making around the turn of the Century.

97. OLD SAROUK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·88m x 1·32m

98. OLD SAROUK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·03m x 1·29m

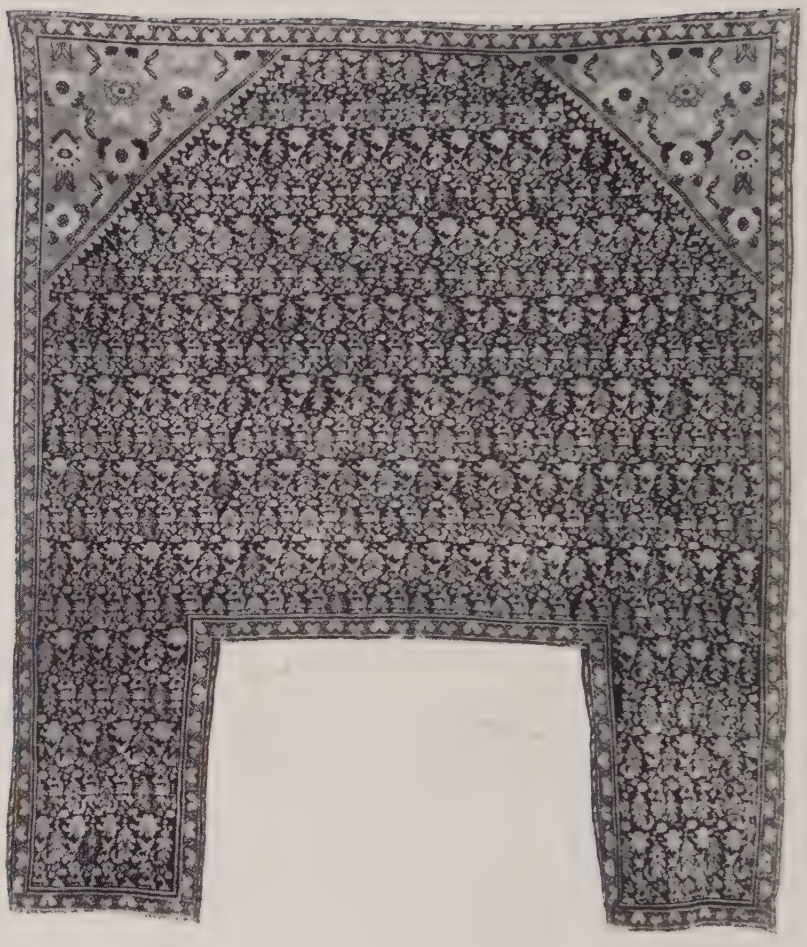
99. OLD ABADEH (CIRCA 1900) 1·98m x 1·52m

100. ANTIQUE SAROUK (CIRCA 1850) 2·96m x 2·04m

101. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·83m x 1·02m

LEFT 102. OLD KARADJA (CIRCA 1900) 3·70m x 1·32m

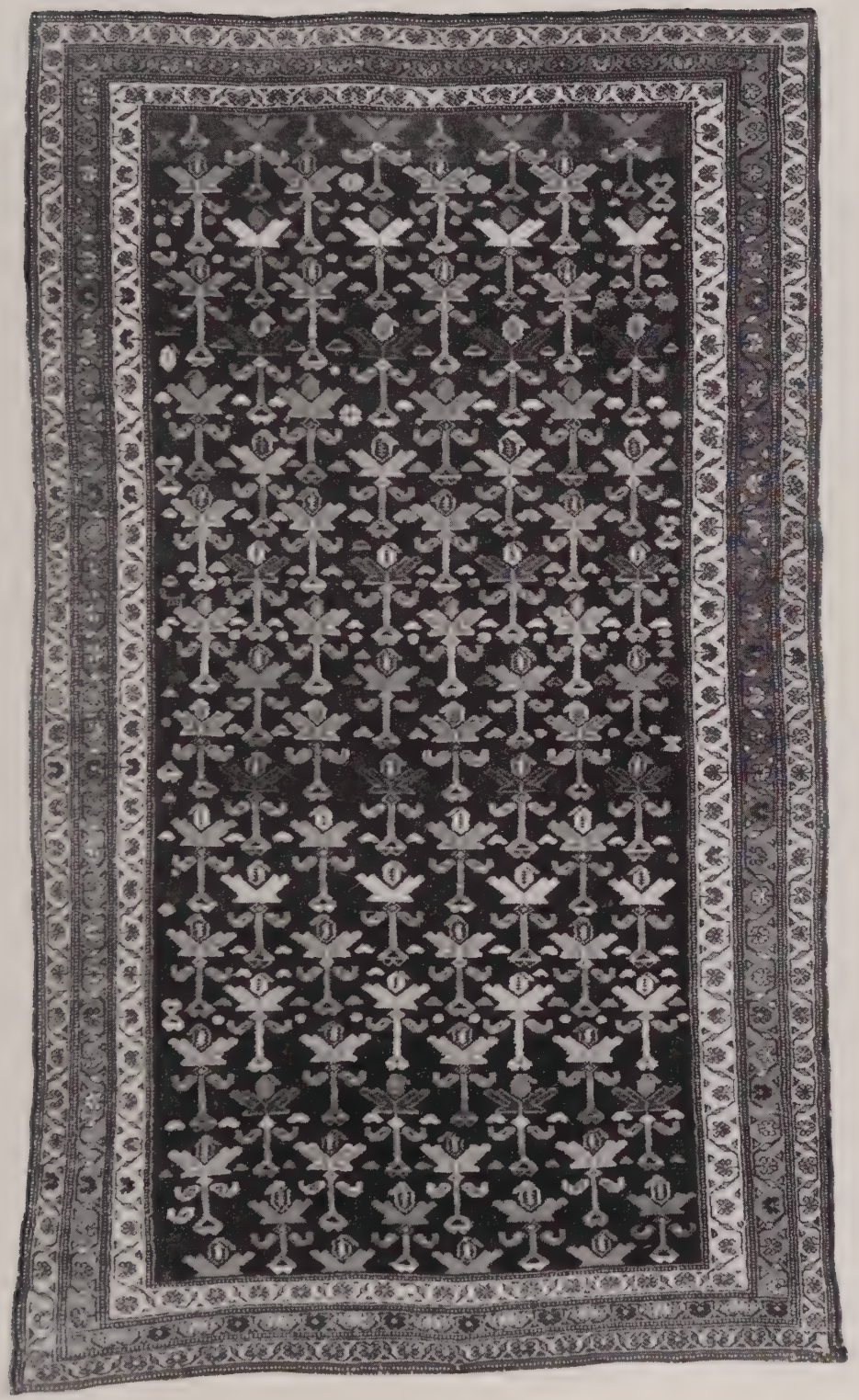
RIGHT 103. OLD HERIZ (CIRCA 1900) 4·87m x 1·17m



104. OLD SENNEH SADDLE COVER (CIRCA 1900) 1·60m x 1·37m

105. SAROUK (MID-20TH CENTURY) 0·80m x 0·64m

106. OLD SENNEH KELIM (CIRCA 1900) 1·67m x 1·15m



107. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·34m x 1·36m

108. BIDJAR (MID-20TH CENTURY) 2·42m x 1·57m

109. OLD TAFRISH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·02m x 1·26m

110. OLD KURDI (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·04m x 1·34m

111. OLD BAKTHIAR (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·98m x 1·37m

112. ANTIQUE KARADJA (CIRCA 1850) 3·77m x 1·67m

113. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·91m x 1·39m

114. OLD BAKTHIAR (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·92m x 1·32m

115. OLD SAROUK (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·97m x 1·28m

116. OLD TAFRISH (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·90m x 1·35m

117. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·65m x 1·25m

118. OLD HERAT (CIRCA 1900—POSSIBLY EARLIER) 1·93m x 1·32m

119. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 5·28m x 2·36m

120. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 5·54m x 2·11m

121. OLD SENNEH HAMADAN (CIRCA 1900) 4·90m x 2·06m

122. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·30m x 0·82m

123. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·29m x 1·17m

124. OLD MAHAL (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·06m x 0·99m

125. OLD HAMADAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 4·50m x 0·95m

126. OLD HERIZ (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·45m x 2·53m

127. OLD HERIZ (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·45m x 2·53m

128. OLD ZIEGLER HERIZ (CIRCA 1900) 3·47m x 2·93m

129. OLD MELLAYER (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·97m x 1·46m

130. OLD BAKTHIAR (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·07m x 1·35m

131. OLD SENNEH KELIM (CIRCA 1900) 2·04m x 1·34m

Town Carpets of Persia

The carpets of the Persian towns are a unique artistic creation, quite unlike any other hand-made Oriental carpet (apart from copies and fakes), yet, to most people, representing the pinnacle of carpet making and, in the most outstanding cases, of Islamic art itself.

The town carpet was, as it were, 'invented' at the start of the 16th Century, when the great Sefavid dynasty of Persian Shahs was heralded in with the ascent of Shah Ismail to the throne. With the confidence of the first truly Persian ruler for many centuries, he founded a glorious period of Persian culture which culminated during the reign of his successors, Shah Tahmasp and Shah Abbas the Great, in what has since become known as the 'Golden Era' of Persian art. At the centre of this extraordinary renaissance in Central Persia were the great carpets of the period—carpets such as the Ardebil and the Chelsea in the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Hunting Carpet in Vienna and the magnificent carpets of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Poldi Pezzoli in Milan and other famous museum collections—a group of carpets unparalleled in beauty, luxury and originality by any other works before or since.

The 'invention' which gave rise to the creation of these extraordinary objects was the drawn or painted carpet design and, as its corollary, the use of the curved line. Court miniaturists were given the task of creating new carpet designs to reflect the splendour and majesty of the Sefavid Court, and weavers were brought into the great manufactories of Kashan, Isphahan, Tabriz, Kirman and Herat from the surrounding districts to interpret these designs in wool, silk and metal thread, working entirely from the design charts, employing the curved line which was the premise of the new aesthetic, and knotting more finely, over greater areas, with more detail and colour, than had ever been attempted before. With the creation of these carpets, the art of the town workshop was born, and it has continued on approximately the same course ever since.

Following the 'Golden Era' the town carpet went into a decline during the turbulent years of the 18th and early 19th Centuries in Persia, and it was not until the latter half of the 19th Century, encouraged by tremendous interest abroad and by the far-sighted investment and experimentation of the merchants of Tabriz, that the Persian town carpet returned to some of the exacting standards of its earliest days, and a second great period of urban carpet knotting was inaugurated. The rugs and carpets of the Persian towns in this exhibiton come from this second major era, a time in which works were produced which were finer, more intricate, more consciously graceful and elegant, more luxurious and more openly experimental, as well as more valuable, than any other carpets being made elsewhere in the East at that time. While unable to match the unlimited freedom of the Court-subsidized Sefavid carpets, the new generation of weavers and workshop owners in Persia took as their models the carpets of the 16th and 17th Centuries, and interpreted them in whatever materials and methods were available—the result was a series of superb carpets and rugs in the 'floral' or 'curvilinear' style which have remained unmatched by any subsequent developments in the urban workshops.

The town carpets are made by a quite different method to virtually all the other works in this collection: they are designed in detail by a designer, knotted by one or more weavers who transfer the design from the chart to the loom without any creative contribution of their own beyond the skill in their fingers, dyed by dyers employed by the workshop or operating independently in the town of origin, checked and re-checked by master weavers and workshop owners during the entire process of their manufacture, and invariably sold or presented as gifts upon completion. At the highest level the artistic purpose of the town carpet is perfection. In them you will find none of those irregularities or 'mistakes' which give tribal and village pieces such charm—every detail of their design, colour, fineness of weave, materials employed and finished size is carefully worked out in advance.

There is no single individual employed during their manufacture who one might consider the 'artist'. They are the results of a tradition interpreted by a team of trained and highly skilled workers, somewhat like a film or a piece of theatre. The art is in the finished product alone, not in any one person's contribution to it—to this extent, town carpets are far removed from the highly personal art of the nomad, where the weaver is solely responsible for every aspect of her rug's creation. The town carpet has a grandeur about it which is above the work of one person—it is a peculiarly Islamic approach to art which is often difficult to comprehend for non-Islamic admirers. Yet the beauty and majesty of the finished town carpet is easily appreciated—there are no other carpets in the world which are so refined, so exact in their designs, so delicate in their colouring, so ambitious in their detail and in their breadth of conception, and so breathtaking in their symmetry and masterly control.

The important group of Persian town carpets which forms one of the focal points of this exhibition collection contains exceptional examples from each of

e great urban centres, illustrating both the enor-ous range of designs and approaches found in the wn carpet, as well as the overall cohesion of concept nich characterizes these works: the curved line, the ne stitch, the basic design compositions, the high nality of wool and dyes throughout. The brief notes hich follow indicate points to look for and assess in e works from each centre, together with general cognition characteristics.

ABRIZ

Tabriz, the capital of the Azerbaijan province of orth-West Persia, and the last stopping point of the rient's overland route to the West, has since the 5th Century been famous for its merchants and its eavers. It was the merchants who were the driving rce behind the resuscitation of the Persian carpet in ne late 19th Century, and it was the weavers of abriz who explored most fully every aspect of ersian carpet design and technique during the same eriod.

The typical Tabriz carpet is recognizable almost ntirely by its weave, particularly in its use of the urkish knot, rather than by its design, which is sually taken from any of the other Persian town entres, often employing the classical medallion and rner composition. Knotted in a medium fine weave the excellent wool of the nearby Maku district, on arps and wefts of cotton, most Tabriz carpets are enowned for the evenness and strength of their notting rather than for any high degree of fineness. he colours are also very good, natural vegetable ades being gradually replaced by chrome (rather an aniline) in the period after 1915, with the carpets eing prime examples of that unique sense of colour armony and delicacy which is always associated with ne best urban works.

Splendid examples of the finest quality old Tabriz arpets are to be seen here in Nos. 167 and 172, while o. 153 is an exceptional Tabriz rug, with Nos. 133, 61 and 163 providing evidence of the very high tandard of the more usual Tabriz works from the rn of the Century period. A direct, honest crafts-anship and a delightfully decorative appearance haracterize such pieces.

IESHED

In North-East Persia, the major city of Meshed has or long played a significant role in the history and ulture of Persia, and of Islam in general. The great osque of Meshed houses the shrine of Ali-al-Riza, ighth of the twelve Imams, descendants of Moham-ed: his mosque is ornamented with one of the most agnificent collections of Persian carpets in the orld.

As the capital city of Khorassan, Meshed has important links with the nomadic people of the Turkoman and Belouchi tribes, as well as providing a market place for the many village rugs made in the Khorassan province.

It is also an important workshop centre for urban carpets in its own right, strongly influenced by Tabriz, yet retaining a character of its own which is found in its best pieces.

Knotted in both the Persian and Turkish knot (these latter known often as Tourbaff), in very soft and velvety Khorassan wool on cotton warps and wefts, a medium fine knot count is the most usual quality. The dyes of Mesheds are excellent, often being applied to the yarn by the weavers themselves. Madder red and indigo blue are basic, with a greenish-yellow extract of pomegranate rind being found as a highlight colour.

In design, the influence of Tabriz is strong. The classical medallion-and-corner pattern is often used. But a superbly ornate design known as the 'Islimi pattern' consisting of sweeping spirals and curves arranged symmetrically on the field is an invention of the Meshed workshops themselves. No. 168 here is a masterpiece of Meshed weaving, a quality of carpet seldom designated to this origin, yet typifying in its rich shades the colour preferences of the Khorassan weavers. Other fine examples of the city's products will be seen in Nos. 159, 164 and 170.

KASHAN

Situated on the edge of the Great Lut desert, between Isphahan and Teheran, Kashan's relatively low altitude and arid surroundings prevented any reliance upon agriculture for its prosperity, and instead the hard-working citizens developed their natural skills in the creation of textiles, and over a long period of time turned Kashan into one of the three main centres of carpet production in Persia, if not in the world.

Of great importance in the 16th and 17th Centuries as a carpet making community, being most probably the origin of the Ardebil Carpet among other historic works, the Kashan workshops suffered a severe decline for well over a century, until revitalized beyond recognition in the second Golden Age of the late 19th Century.

Unlike in many of the other town centres, Kashan rugs were knotted usually in the weaver's home, on a small upright loom. Rug sizes were most common, wonderfully knotted in highly traditional and standardized designs. Carpets over 2·5 metres long were

unusual, although—as the two fine examples Nos. 169 and 171 here demonstrate—the large carpets which were made possessed the same degree of artistry and fineness which is found in the exquisite smaller rugs. Many homes had two identical looms, thus several 'pairs' of rugs were made, exact in almost every detail, only minute examination revealing those slight discrepancies which are the hall-mark of the genuine hand-made rug. Nos. 136, 148/9, and, outstandingly, Nos. 138/9 provide brilliant examples of Kashan pairs from the early period of this second renaissance.

A remarkable feature of many of the best Kashans made before 1930 is their wool—this was Merino wool, exclusively imported from Manchester, England, and chosen by the Kashan workshops as providing the finest of all wools for the making of carpets. The rich, glossy texture of the wool combines with its tremendous pliancy and softness to the touch to produce naps on good Kashans of the most enduring beauty —silky, lustrous, very fine in the knot, and exceptionally hard-wearing. That this wool was very expensive to purchase indicates the seriousness with which the Kashanis approached their carpet making.

The weavers, mainly women, were extremely skilled: even a medium quality Kashan from this period can be expected to contain upwards of 250 knots to the square inch, tied on cotton warps and wefts in the Persian knot. Dyes were applied by local dyemasters, following the instructions of the workshop owner. An enormous range of colours was used, with madder red and indigo usually being dominant against a cream field.

The most famous Kashan design consists of an oval central medallion set on a field of delicate leaves, stems and palmettes ornamented with cornerpieces which echo the medallion, the whole encased in a main border of 'Shah Abbas' palmettes set on a vine tendril, or meander. Variations in the shape of the medallion and in the secondary ornamentation are encountered, and several rugs with animal and bird forms, often around a central Tree of Life, were knotted at the end of the last Century. The great silk rugs of Kashan will be discussed in the next section.

The apparent similarity between the design of one Kashan and the next provides an opportunity for detailed comparison between such works: evaluating the precision with which each motif is drawn, the quality of wool and dyes, the fineness of the stitch and variations in the internal design of the medallion and borders will usually reveal a wealth of differences which are of great interest to the collector. Yet however different in their details, Kashans are invariably graceful and possess that calm assurance of classica art which is always satisfying to behold and which, a its height, has a poetic appeal that is quite unique.

The several examples of Kashan rugs and carpet in this exhibition provide a comprehensive view of the finest work from the important period at the end o the last Century. The superb Tree of Life pair (Nos 138, 139) is Kashani carpet-making at its highest and most perfect peak, while virtually all the other rugs are of a calibre so consistently high that we can only marvel at the standards the workshops, weavers and dyers set themselves in this last great period of Kashani knotting (see also Nos. 140, an outstanding part silk work, 141, the superb 142, 143, 144, 145, 148/9, a rare pair of part silks, 152, 156 and 160).

ISPHAHAN

Isphahan, 'The Venice of the East', lies at the Southern end of the high plateau which dominates Persia, watered by one of the few rivers in the country, the Zaindeh Rud. It is here that one finds the heritage of the Sefavid dynasty at its most magnificent—with the superb mosques, squares, houses and colleges of the period having established Isphahan for all time as the cultural and artistic city par excellence of Persia. Hardly surprising that from a city so enchanting and splendid, some of the most beautiful carpets ever made originated and, perhaps, will continue to originate.

In common with the other main carpet towns, Isphahan rose to its height in the early 17th Century when Shah Abbas established his court there, and then went into a dramatic decline until half way through the 19th Century, when once again flawless carpets which are synonymous with the name Isphahan began to be made in limited quantities.

On the whole rather finer than Kashans, with more adventurous designs often adapted from the exquisite tile and ceramic work of the city's mosques, Isphahans are, at their best, the best of all Persian carpets and, at the worst, still superior to almost all others. If there is a point to criticise, it may be in their colouring. Wool was bought ready-dyed from one of the famous master-dyers of the city, and the weaver and designer had to adapt their carpets to the colours of wool available. This practice sometimes results in a certain lack of originality in some rugs, although this is compensated for by the chance results of unsurpassed beauty so often created by this somewhat haphazard method of mixing a carpet's colour scheme.

Apart from this one slight disclaimer, Isphahan rugs are quite exceptional in terms of their materials

sually wool on cotton foundation threads), their estuffs, the exquisite scrollwork and leaf-and-tendril otifs of their designs, their extraordinary closeness weave, almost invariably upwards of 200 knots to e square inch, and the very thin, supple handle of e finished product.

An example of the most outstanding Isphahan eave of the second great period will be found in hibit No. 158, a carpet of supreme beauty and ace. No. 162 is a rug of the same exceptional calibre, nile Nos. 150 and 154 provide excellent specimens the more frequently-encountered type of Isphahan, autiful rugs of fine quality to rival almost any nilar works from elsewhere.

RMAN

Far removed from the main currents of Central ersian life in its remote, arid province of desert and rub in South East Persia, Kirman remained one of e most unknown and undeveloped of Persian cities ntil it rose suddenly to prominence as a carpet-aking centre of the most rarified kind towards the nd of the last century.

That carpets were made in the Kirman district efore that period is a major theme explored in the Vorld of Islam exhibition 'Carpets of Central Persia', the Mappin Gallery, Sheffield. Until recently, the eriod around the end of the 19th Century had been onsidered Kirman's first and greatest carpet-making ra, an era characterized by brilliantly successful xperiments in colour and design, combined with that igh technical ability on the part of its weavers and yers which is an essential pre-requisite for a succes-ul carpet.

Supported, once again, by the merchants of Tabriz, ne designers and weavers of Kirman refused to be nfluenced by anything other than their own intuition, eveloped over two centuries of shawl-making and ne weaving of various exquisite textiles. When the orkshops began once more to produce carpets, they ere quickly recognized as being among the most out-anding in Persia, in terms of materials, quality, olour and design.

The wool in which they were made in the Persian not was gathered from the sheep of Kirman pro-ince, and proved to be ideal for carpet making: light nd fine in fibre, yet heavy in natural oils, the wool ossessed a wonderfuly soft, lustrous appeal. In the notting, three cotton wefts were inserted between ach row of knots, a most unusual practice in urban arpet manufacture. The warps were also of cotton, nd the prevalence of several large carpets from the town suggests that looms were generally bigger than in the other urban centres, although several very fine small rugs also have come down to us.

Although exceptional for their materials and quality of weave, it is due mainly to the marvellous blending of colour and design in these early Kirmans that they enjoy such a universal reputation. The tradition of the master designers in Kirman is famous throughout Persia, a tradition which arose out of the designs for shawls and fine woollen materials used for the coats of Persian grandees in the 18th and 19th Centuries. The lupin-like motifs of such clothes were adapted for use in the carpets, as were the renowned medallion-and-corner designs, executed in a more consciously 'floral' manner than in any other carpets in Persia. For the smaller rugs, lovely arboreal patterns were often employed, many with delicately-knotted songbirds in the field and borders.

Characteristic of these early Kirmans was an airiness and delicacy of colour. Often this was achieved by the creation of two-tone effects in the same floral motif—rose and light rose, green and light green, blue and light blue—such motifs generally drawn without constricting outlines. In later rugs and carpets, experiments with new patterns led to exciting interpretations of the medallion-and-corner designs, all-over repeating patterns and extremely elegant panel designs. Dyes were almost invariably vegetable, with the principal dyestuffs being indigo, the reddish-purple of cochineal, madder red, the brown from walnut husks, weld yellow, green from the rind of the pomegranate and various shades of yellow extracted from vine leaves, straw and henna. Such colours were combined in so many different ways that carpets were made which had both rich, flaming colours and very delicate arrangements of soft pastel shades.

The Kirman carpets on exhibition, Nos. 165 and 166, provide evidence of the high artistic level of the period pieces, with the very large 165 being a truly exceptional example. No. 135 is a rug from the near-by village of Laver, a quality of Kirman weaving of the finest kind. Nos. 132, 146 and the beautiful 155 display the full range of Kirman's creativity in rug making from the early years of this century and the late decades of the last.

TEHERAN

From the middle of the last century onwards, a few rugs were made in the city of Teheran which was later to become the capital of modern Iran. Before that time there was no tradition of carpet making in the town, and only a few, usually very rare, rugs have been made there since. Those that were produced in

the period 1880–1900 survive as among the finest of all Persian rugs from this important era. Technically similar to Kashans, with some influence from Tabriz Teherans usually possess a nap of extremely fine wool, very soft to the touch, and tightly knotted with great expertise. The high mineral content of local streams contributed to the final appearance of these rugs—after washing in such water they took on a deep and lasting sheen which gives them a unique beauty of their own.

The designs of Teherans are probably the finest and most elaborate of any in Persia, showing a certain European influence in some motifs, particularly in a brilliant adaptation of the French 'mille-fleurs' pattern. By integrating this design with a typically Persian vase form, the Teheran designers created a highly original and unmistakably Persian carpet arrangement which is very attractive to Western eyes.

Delicate pastel shades of blue, yellow, ivory, green rose and turquoise were used in the delineation o such designs, while designs containing animal motif often employ darker shades of madder, with blue and greens.

The exquisite beauty of Teheran rugs, combined with their very high degree of craftsmanship and their rapidly increasing rarity make them among the most sought-after of Persian town rugs from the 19th Century period. The four examples of the weave here Nos. 134, 147, 151 and 157—amply demonstrate the restrained elegance and superb quality of the best old Teherans, to be considered at least on a par with other rugs from the more traditional urban origins This group of rare Teheran rugs provides a definitive standard for judging many of the other town carpets and rugs in this exceptional collection.

132. OLD KIRMAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·72m x 1·12m

133. OLD TABRIZ (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·94m x 1·37m

134. OLD TEHERAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·13m x 1·47m

135. OLD KIRMAN LAVER (CIRCA 1900) 2·28m x 1·41m

136 & 137. PAIR OF OLD KASHANS (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·95m x 1·30m

138 & 139. PAIR OF ANTIQUE KASHANS (CIRCA 1850) 2·00m x 1·30m

140. OLD KASHAN (WITH SILK) (CIRCA 1900) 2·22m x 1·35m

141. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·04m x 1·37m

142. ANTIQUE KASHAN (CIRCA 1850) 2·04m x 1·32m

143. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·95m x 1·34m

144. OLD KASHAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·13m x 1·32m

145. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·04m x 1·32m

146. OLD KIRMAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·13m x 1·40m

147. OLD TEHERAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·91m x 1·40m

148 & 149. PAIR OF OLD KASHANS (WITH SILK)
(EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·07m x 1·34m

150. OLD ISPHAHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·03m x 1·43m

151. OLD TEHERAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·14m x 1·17m

152. ANTIQUE KASHAN (CIRCA 1850) 1·90m x 1·30m

153. OLD TABRIZ (CIRCA 1900) 1·95m x 1·38m

154. OLD ISPHAHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·08m x 1·40m

155. OLD KIRMAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·03m x 1·35m

156. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·03m x 1·29m

157. OLD TEHERAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 3·02m x 1·90m

158. OLD ISPHAHAN (CIRCA 1900) 4·04m x 3·10m

159. OLD MESHED (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·72m x 1·30m

160. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·10m x 1·37m

161. OLD TABRIZ (CIRCA 100) 1·88m x 1·42m

162. OLD ISPHAHAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·96m x 1·45m

163. OLD TABRIZ (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·00m x 1·40m

164. OLD MESHED (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 4·10m x 3·20m

165. OLD KIRMAN (CIRCA 1900) 6·09m x 4·37m

166. OLD KIRMAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·33m x 2·39m

167. ANTIQUE TABRIZ (MID-19TH CENTURY) 4·00m x 3·02m

168. OLD MESHED (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 5·64m x 3·00m

169. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·25m x 2·16m

170. OLD MESHED (CIRCA 1900) 3·53m x 2·62m

171. OLD KASHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 3·05m x 2·36m

172. OLD TABRIZ (CIRCA 1900) 4·08m x 3·06m

The Silk Rugs of Persia

Silk has always been among the most precious and beautiful of materials known to man, and its use in the making of textiles has been traditionally associated with the highest and most ornate forms of applied art. That Oriental carpets should be made in silk has about it an historic, cultural and geographic inevitability which is readily apparent. The great Silk Route along which the camel caravans transported their wares stretched from China to Constantinople, passing through all of the major carpet producing countries on its immense journey; silk was thus from the earliest times a material which the Eastern weavers understood and admired, and its natural properties lent themselves to the creation of a type and appearance of knotted rug which appealed to the most ambitious aspirations of the Eastern artist. Moreover, the age-old association of silk with Imperial power and Courtly extravagence found its most renowned expression in the great carpets of the Sefavid dynasty, carpets which celebrated the prestige and pride of these triumphant Persian Shahs, as well as achieving a level of majestic beauty which would have been possible with no other material. The achievement of the Sefavid silk carpets, of which the silk Hunting Carpet in the Vienna Museum für angewandte Kunst is perhaps the most astonishing example, established a tradition of silk carpet knotting in Persia which has continued down to the present day, and which has always represented to both the Persian weaver and the connoisseur of fine carpets the very peak of the art of hand-knotted textiles.

Although there can be little to match the exquisite delicacy of the finished silk rug, there are good reasons why such works are both rare and valuable. Silk in itself is the most costly of all materials in the making of rugs, its complex and extremely limited extraction from the severely localized silkworm combining with its charismatic appeal to make it both rare and in tremendous demand, curtailing its use to only a few rugs or carpets which their makers consider worthy of the most lavish treatment. Quite apart from its cost and the problems involved in obtaining the large amounts of silk required to knot even a small rug, it is an extremely difficult material to work in, making enormous demands on the most skilful of master weavers. While most Oriental town rugs are made by teams of apprentices under the direction of a head knotter, the silk rug is the province of the master himself, and master weavers are as rare in their way, as silk is in itself. Since, on warps and wefts of finely spun silk, a pile can be knotted in silk far finer, with far more knots to the square inch, than is possible with any other material, this degree of fineness is nearly always attempted and only the most practiced and creative knotter is capable of such controlled and exacting work. Add to this the fact that silk is less easy to handle than wool, requiring a firmer, more precise movement of the fingers in the tying of every knot, then the great rarity and value of silk rugs is thrown more into perspective. However much every Persian town workshop might wish to produce silk rugs by the thousand, for their beauty and commercial value, it is only the privilege of a few renowned ateliers to be able to achieve these masterworks, with each small rug taking perhaps well over a year to make.

Possibly as a result of the enormous investment in terms of time, skill, patience and money required in the making of a silk rug, the quality of the finished work is consistently of an extraordinary high level. The commitment to his rug demanded of the weaver is expressed in a fineness of knotting, a closeness and evenness of pile, and a complexity and exactitude of design details found in almost no other type of rug. This depth and integrity of workmanship combines with the intrinsic qualities of the material itself to create rugs of unparalleled beauty, works of purely decorative art intended to delight the eye like paintings rather than be used as functional floor coverings.

The quality of silk rugs is variable—the quality of the actual materials, the fineness of the knotting, the exploitation of the light-reflecting properties of the silk, its dyeing and spinning are all capable of variation. Natural silk can be tested by burning a small strand—it should wither into a small, sticky lump, smelling of burnt hair. Artificial silk (otherwise known as jap silk or mercerized cotton) is used in the making of many rugs usually of fairly recent manufacture, often originating from Anatolia or India—it burns like cotton, forming a thin, greyish-white ash which smells of burnt paper. It is also much warmer to the touch than true silk—the finer the natural silk used, the colder the pile of a rug will feel when brushed lightly with the palm. As one moves around a silk rug, the colours should change dramatically, passing from a dazzling brilliance when viewed along the lie of the pile to a deep, rich glow when viewed into its slant. This constantly changing appearance of a good silk rug provides one of its most unforgettable pleasures—even as the light of the day changes, so the colours in the rug will alter with an elusive and magical effect, as though the rug were almost a living thing, always different in appearance, constantly revealing new and unexpected delights.

Since the Court manufactories of the Sefavid Shahs first discovered and revealed the magnificence that that silk could bring to a knotted pile carpet, silk

gs and carpets have continued to be made since, nerever the expert weaver could be found, and the ecious material acquired. Although other countries, rticularly Turkey in its great Hereke workshops, e India of the Moghuls and the Turkoman terriries in a few of their finest ceremonial carpets, nployed and explored the possibilities of silk in the aking of carpets, the natural home of the silk rug as always remained Persia. Even here, where the eavers are most skilful, the workshops more prosrous and the tradition of silk work more deeply grained than in any other producing country, only few centres of production possessed the necessary quirements of craft and artistry to make consistently ne and perfectly-conceived silk rugs.

At the forefront of such centres were, and remain, ashan and Isphahan, the true homes of the silk rug. he master weavers of Tabriz were also responsible r some exquisite works, occasionally in relatively rge sizes. And, under the patronage of the Tabriz erchants, the weavers of the remote Heriz group of villages produced a few remarkable and extremely rare rugs (see No. 175), quite unique in style and colouring, knotted mainly during the second half of the last century. The approximate period 1870-1910 represented the second great age of silk carpets in Persia, when quality of materials, beauty of dyes and design and skill in manipulating the silk into the finest of all weaves combined to produce the superb works of the age which have remained unmatched since. Such rugs remain extremely rare and valuable—the exceptional group exhibited here represent perhaps the most important collection in London. They display the magnificence and peerless beauty of these famous rugs at their height, each example being of major artistic and historic importance, in a range of styles and designs it is seldom possible to view in contrast to each other. These superb old and antique silk rugs provide the centrepiece of the Anglo Persian Carpet Company's special collection.

173. OLD SILK KASHAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·08m x 1·32m

174. OLD SILK KASHAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·13m x 1·29m

175. ANTIQUE SILK HERIZ (CIRCA 1850) 1·80m x 1·32m

176. OLD SILK KASHAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·03m x 1·24m

177. OLD SILK KASHAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·12m x 1·27m

178. OLD SILK KASHAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·96m x 1·24m

179. OLD SILK ISPHAHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·08m x 1·35m

180. OLD SILK KASHAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·98m x 1·24m

Turkish Rugs

Of the major Oriental carpet producing areas, Turkey ranks as second only to Persia in the historical importance of its carpets, in their magnificence and artistic appeal, and in the number of outstanding works produced over the centuries. Many connoisseurs, in fact, regard the Turkish carpet as being more truly definitive of the carpet maker's art than the Persian: this view designates the development of Turkish carpets as being the central tradition of carpet knotting, with the Persian carpets of the 16th Century onwards representing a deviation, however brilliant and successful, from the authentic aesthetic of Oriental carpet production.

The tremendous reputation of Turkish carpets, and their overriding historical significance, rests upon two factors: the extremely old tradition of carpet making in the Turkish area, evidenced by examples ('the Konya carpets' of the Turk ve Islam Museum) dating back to the 13th Century, the earliest surviving knotted carpets of Islam; and at least two major periods of carpet weaving which produced a number of highly original works universally regarded as being among the greatest masterpieces in the history of the Oriental carpet.

The first of these periods coincided approximately with the Persian 'Golden Era' of the Sefavid Shahs, and was similarly encouraged and patronized by a powerful dynasty—the Ottoman Emperors. Influenced to some extent by the remarkable new designs being created by the Persian miniaturists, the carpets of the Ottoman Court manufactories possessed a unique individuality of their own, while achieving a magnificence and a pure form of abstract beauty which both rivalled and balanced the dazzling and much more naturalistic creations of Kashan, Isphahan and Tabriz.

Most famous and most definitive of the Turkish carpets of the Ottoman era were those made in the manufactory at Ushak from the 16th Century onwards. In the early pieces, two basic designs characterized the Ushaks—the 'Star' design of allover cruciform motifs, usually found on works of rug size, and the 'Medallion' design of the great ceremonial carpets, exemplified by the superb work included in this exhibition, No. 197. For the dignity and nobility of its composition and for the marvellously rich and restrained colours in which this was worked, the Medallion Ushak remains the supreme expression of the Turkish artistic spirit under the Ottomans, and is generally regarded as one of the most beautiful and successful types of Oriental carpet ever made.

The Ushak workshops continued to produce remarkable carpets until well into the 18th Century, the design being slowly adapted to meet changing tastes and as new influences were absorbed by the Turkish weavers. Carpet No. 196 is a rare example of these later Ushaks, providing a fascinating comparison with the earlier, more characteristic work. Other designs were also developed in Ushak, notably the angular leaf-design of the so-called 'Bird rugs'. No. 192 in the exhibition is an extremely accurate rendering of the Bird design, knotted during the 19th Century, possibly in the Transylvanian area of what is today called Roumania, then closely linked with the powerful Turkish Empire.

The period of the great carpets of the Ottomans was succeeded during the 17th and 18th Centuries by the second major era of Turkish weaving—the age of the Anatolian prayer rug. From the villages of Ghiordes, Ladik, Kula, Melas and Konya appeared a series of exquisite rugs in the prayer design of prayer field, or mihrab, surmounted by a prayer arch which was to be pointed towards Mecca, this often supported on two or more pillars. Such rugs, made in only small numbers and today housed almost entirely in the great museums of the world, not only established for all time a symbol of near-perfection in the design and making of the Islamic prayer rug, they also profoundly influenced the subsequent development of nearly all Turkish village rugs during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Many of the 19th Century works in the exhibition are derived directly from the original Anatolian prayer rugs, with No. 191, a superbly-made Ghiordes design from Panderma, catching precisely the graceful elegance and richly harmonious colouring of the early masterpieces.

While the traditional Anatolian weaving centres continued to knot rugs during the 19th Century, the demand for such works so far outweighed their availability that new workshops were founded in Panderma, Pergamon, Kaiseri and elsewhere to produce very finely-made rugs in the prayer and other designs to meet the enthusiasm for such works from abroad. In several cases, being knotted on cotton rather than woollen foundation threads, these new rugs were far finer than their originals, and the expertise in weaving and dyeing demonstrated in them has made them extremely popular with contemporary collectors who appreciate the accuracy with which the old designs have been recreated. Several examples in this exhibition indicate the high standards of these 19th Century Turkish workshops.

The workshop at Brussa gained an enormous reputation for its superb silk rugs, made from the very fine local silk of the district, and designed in a style

eatly influenced by the old Persian Court carpets. ıg No. 190 provides evidence of the scarce Brussa eave at its finest.

Simultaneously with the establishment of new orkshops in Central Anatolia, there was a series of gs being made in the more remote and inaccessible stricts of Turkey which are today being regarded as presentative of the third great age of Turkish eaving. Principally made in the Bergama area of estern Turkey, these rugs are quite unlike any other rviving Turkish works, yet they obviously come om a most ancient tradition of tribal weaving, the igins of which are obscured by lack of evidence. ong in the pile, of wonderfuly soft and lustrous ool, the Bergama rug is a powerfully primitive eation. Its designs are bold and striking, very similar character to the designs of some Caucasian rugs, hile the colours possess a unique softness and deli-acy which is seldom found in the rugs of tribal com-unities or remote villages. The rough charm, the ysterious symbolism and the superb technique em-bodied in the old Bergamas has made them much sought-after by collectors who see in them the same individuality and striking sense of colours and design which characterizes the finest Caucasian rugs. They are, unfortunately, extremely rare today, and we are privileged to be able to include two exceptional pieces of definitive appearance in this exhibition—Nos. 181 and 189.

Somewhat similar to the Bergamas—made by settled tribal groups—are the rugs knotted by the nomads of Turkey, known as Yuruks (= 'wanderer'). These have an even longer pile indicating a mountain origin in Eastern Turkey, and are usually made in sombre, often earthy colours. Yuruks possess tremendous personality and are generally made with that high degree of skill and care which is a hallmark of the genuine nomadic rug. No. 182 is a very old and good example of the weave, and No. 194, probably Yuruk, indicates the strong influence of the Caucasus (in this case Kazak) on the tribal rugs of Turkey.

181. ANTIQUE BERGAMA (CIRCA 1850) 1·37m x 0·90m

182. ANTIQUE YURUK (CIRCA 1850) 1·66m x 1·43m

183. OLD YURUK (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·24m x 1·27m

184. ANTIQUE BERGAMA KELIM (CIRCA 1850) 1·95m x 1·56m

185. OLD MADEN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·90m x 1·13m

186. OLD PANDERMA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·69m x 1·26m

187. OLD PERGAM (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·49m x 1·60m

188. OLD KONYA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·87m x 1·35m

189. ANTIQUE BERGAMA (CIRCA 1800) 1·93m x 1·45m

190. ANTIQUE SILK BRUSSA (CIRCA 1850) 1·80m x 1·29m

191. ANTIQUE PANDERMA (CIRCA 1850) 1·93m x 1·42m

192. ANTIQUE BIRD RUG (CIRCA 1800) 2·59m x 1·83m

193. OLD PANDERMA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·73m x 1·50m

194. OLD ANATOLIAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·58m x 1·07m

195. OLD TURKISH KELIM (DATED 1903) 2·05m x 1·28m

196. ANTIQUE USHAK (CIRCA 1750) 4·57m x 2·62m

197. ANTIQUE USHAK (CIRCA 1650) 5·00m x 2·57m

Rugs and Weavings of the Turkoman and Uzbek Tribes

The rugs of the Turkoman nomads of the Central Asian Steppe—a vast tract of scrub and grassland stretching from the Eastern shores of the Caspian to Chinese Turkestan and North Afghanistan—hold a particular fascination for the contemporary collector. Highly formalized in design and colour, the distinctions between rugs knotted by the different tribes are at once subtle and culturally illuminating. A degree of sophistication and knowledge is required in the evaluation of one Turkoman rug against another which is perhaps more difficult and challenging to acquire than that demanded by rugs from other origins. The apparent similarity of most Turkoman rugs is deceptive—each rug has its own story to tell, each throws new light on the colourful and often mysterious background of the tribe who knotted it, each provides an aesthetic experience which is wholly individual yet so delicately contrasted with other rugs of the origin that its individuality may at first sight appear entirely submerged beneath the artistic unity of all rugs from the same tribe or tribal group. Yet even without the comparative experience needed to appreciate the full beauty and documentary evidence provided by every authentic Turkoman rug, the superbly rich and harmonious colours, particularly in the subtly contrasted shades of red, and the powerful symmetry and expressive force of the designs, executed often in remarkably fine knotting techniques, are easily perceived by the visually-aware laymen.

Moreover, the lives, customs and highly defined culture of the Turkoman people themselves are of tremendous interest to the Western enthusiast, representing as they do aspects of a civilization which has virtually disappeared today, yet which was until only recently one of the most energetic and influential of Asian tribal lifestyles. And the hand-knotted carpet was to the Turkoman people themselves, and to their historians and commentators, the very language and literature of that existence. By careful study and analysis of all aspects of the Turkoman carpet—its design, the symbolic and ethnographic meaning of its ornaments, the dyes and materials employed, even its size—we have the most reliable and direct expression of the lives, aspirations and history of the people who made them. This aspect, without doubt, provides one of the greatest pleasures in their collection.

Up until the end of the Nineteenth Century, the majority of the great Turkoman tribes were truly nomadic in their existence. Superb horsemen, they would migrate over enormous distances in the wake of their herds, pitching their hut-like tents or 'yurts' wherever pasturage was favourable. Their warlike tendencies—Tamburlaine the Great himself was a Turkoman—were expressed in constant inter-tribal feuding and a jostling for power and wealth between the major tribes. As will be described later, the results of this power struggle are expressed most clearly in the rugs of each tribe, and they provide our main source of evidence on the complex history of Turkoman politics and on the relative influence of each tribe, at given points in time.

The migratory existence of the Turkoman, and the importance—both symbolic and practical—of each family's yurt, determine the variety and style of the rugs made by these fierce and proud nomadic people. Apart from the large carpets—which possess a special significance of their own—almost all other Turkoman rugs and weavings combined a strictly utilitarian function with an artistic and ethnographical motivation to their designs, weaves and colouring which makes them unique among the knotted rugs of the Orient.

In the yurt, the home and the symbol of the family's prestige, an enormous variety of different textiles was employed. On the floor were the small, almost square, rugs consisting of rows of 'guls'—oval or octagonal emblems which are the main characteristic of Turkoman rugs, and also the repositories of their cultural and symbolic meanings—contained within intricate border stripes with a decorative panel at each end. Such rugs were the seats and tables of the yurt, providing warmth and colour in the cold nights of the arid Steppe. Hanging from the walls of the yurt was a wide variety of bags, in which the women stored wools, utensils, threads and all the necessary paraphernalia of the nomad's home life, the equivalent of the western cupboard or chest of drawers. The most frequently encountered of these bags are called Juvals (see No. 201)—usually about 5′ x 3′, and the smaller Torbas, often about 2′ square. Such bags were also used for storing tents and other items when the tribe was on the move, slung over the backs of horses and donkeys. Around the inside of the yurt were decorative bands known as 'yolami' or 'bou' which were used to cover the juncture between the upright sides and the roof poles—such bands provided immense scope for the weavers imagination, and are often composed of a mixture of knotted pile and flat-weave. 'Engsi', usually known as 'hatchli' (see Nos. 206, 235) were hung over the entrance to the yurt. The mihrab or prayer arch forms often used in the composition of these cruciform rugs suggests they may also have been used as prayer rugs, since from the main Turkoman tribes—the Tekke, the Yamout, the Saryq and the Salor—no traditionally-designed prayer rugs exist.

Numerous other shapes and sizes of rugs were made to decorate the tribe's horses, to hang on the outside of the yurt to embellish camels and horses in bridal processions, even to contain tent poles, to hold hot pans, to store salt, frame mirrors and an extraordinary range of other functions, indicating the vital and central importance of the hand-knotted textile in the life of the Turkoman.

Every rug, carpet and decoration was made by the women of the tribe—it is interesting that the hand-knotted textile, the highest and most important art form of the Turkoman people, should be the work of a female artist. In few other cultures do we find women taking the role of major artist, and we may perhaps explain this phenomenon by remembering that in Turkoman society art was functional—the women needed their juvals and hatchlis for the home, and the tribal culture demanded that such items should also be the prime expression of their artistic aspirations. This is merely one of the fascinating avenues of speculation and study inspired by the rugs of the Turkoman.

Into almost all their works, the women put a degree of skill and dedication often of quite extraordinary calibre. For not only was the status and (in dowry terms) the success of each individual yurt family determined by the quality of rugs and decorations they produced, this level of quality also reflected upon the standing of the tribe to which the weaver belonged. The motivations of familial and tribal pride, far more than commercial necessity or even the ego of the individual artist, ensured a commitment to excellence on the part of the weaver which resulted in some of the finest and most exquisitely-worked objects of tribal art produced anywhere in the world. And the ultimate expression of this motivating pride is found in the emblem known as the Gul.

THE TURKOMAN GUL

The word 'Gul' or 'Göl' has traditionally been regarded as meaning 'flower' from the Persian. But an article in the Afghan Historical Journal traces the word back to an earlier linguistic source where it can be translated as 'family', and such a meaning would appear to be far more acceptable in the light of what has been discovered about the significance of the gul in Turkoman rugs. Very briefly, the gul motif found on so many Turkoman rugs (strictly speaking the larger, primary ornaments are called göls, the interspersing secondary ornaments, often cruciform in design, are 'guls') was apparently a form of emblem representing the tribe who made the rug—the nearest Western counterpart to its significance is the flag or battle standard, a symbol of the pride and honour of the people it represents. In the power and territorial struggles of the Turkoman tribes, the gul became a symbol of success or failure. A triumphant tribe—in the 19th Century the Tekkes were by far the largest and most dominant group—would, upon conquering another rival tribe, expropriate the gul of its large carpets and incorporate it into their own works. A subjected tribe (such as the Chodors, who virtually ceased to exist in the last century, after earlier eras of supremacy) was forbidden to use its gul in its large carpets, such carpets in themselves representing power and success in battle. Instead, they were only able to maintain the heritage of their gul in the minor juvals and torbas of the family yurt. It is for this reason that many of these utilitarian objects made by the weaker tribes, such as the Salor, were made with a degree of artistry and astonishing workmanship quite out of keeping with their mundane functional purpose—the traditions and honour of the vanquished tribe could find expression only in the maintenance of their gul depicted with all the respect and loyalty due to it. Nevertheless, once the gul of a tribe's main carpet was transferred to its juvals and torbas, thus losing its symbolic representation of independance and influence, it became known as a 'dead' gul. It had lost the meaning it had once possessed.

For the great and conquering tribes of the Turkoman—the Tekke, the Saryq, the Yamout etc.—the large carpet and the living pride of its gul was the outward expression of the tribe's standing. The guls of conquered tribes were knotted, still with tremendous care, into juvals and torbas. With time, the guls of different tribes merged with each other and, as the tribal system began to disintegrate during this century, slowly lost the force of their original meaning. 'Bokhara' rugs, a generalized trade name for Turkoman rugs knotted from around 1900 on, cannot be confidently ascribed to any specific tribe. Yet their use of the Tekke gul is ample testimony to the immense power of that tribe, its gul being virtually imposed upon the rugs of all other Turkoman groups save the Yamout, who also maintained a major gul of their own.

The meaning of the Turkoman guls, their use as documentary evidence of the history of the tribes since the 18th Century (few, if any, Turkoman carpets can be dated earlier than this—since they were made to be used rather than simply displayed, the ravages of a nomadic existence gave them a shorter lifespan than, say, the ceremonial carpets of Persia), their intrinsic beauty and their gradual de-

velopment and alteration all provide the collector of Turkomans with an inexhaustible subject of study, research and hypothesis.

THE CARPETS AND RUGS OF AFGHANISTAN

The major Turkoman tribes of Central Asia—Tekke, Yamout, Saryk, Salor, Chodor and Ersari—infiltrated eastwards and into Northern Persia and Afghanistan. On the North Afghanistan border, the Ersari and the Beshir lived in large migratory communities, producing rugs and, in the case of the Beshir, several large carpets, (usually quite different in design and general flavour to the more traditional Turkoman works (See No. 231, a Beshir prayer rug). Today, the rugs and carpets of these tribes are very highly regarded for their energetic and primitively forceful appearance, not to mention their great rarity.

Within Afghanistan itself, a mixture of Ersaris, subgroups of the Ersaris and Uzbeks from the Bokhara region of Turkmenistan produced rugs and carpets known simply as Afghans. Although several different designs appear in Afghan rugs, as is demonstrated in several exhibits here (the Hatchli in No. 214, the rare inlaid silk juval, No. 200, the Tekke-inspired No. 211), one design above all others is associated with the provenance—the so-called 'Elephant's Foot' design (see No. 205). Here, large octagonal guls are distributed over a red field, within border designs. Afghans tend to be knotted with a much thicker pile and coarser weave than the Russian Turkomans, and they are admired for their rich colouring and wonderfully lustrous wool, rather than for the exquisite precision and subtlety of the finest Turkomans. They should, however, be considered a part of the Turkoman heritage, and one can see, particularly in the true Ersari rugs, a link between the rugs of Afghanistan and those of the Turkoman Steppe. Today, the remnants of Turkoman nomadic culture survive only in Afghanistan, with the Turkomans of North Persia having settled in villages and integrated with the indigenous population.

THE COLOURS OF TURKOMAN RUGS

However much the rugs of the Turkoman may excite and stimulate us with their symbolism, their documentary evidence and their expression of a remote and now virtually extinct civilization, in the final count their immense popularity amog collectors rests upon the aesthetic experience they provide. In their design, the arrangement of major and secondary guls distributed on an open field possesses an elusive quality which is uniquely suited to the Oriental rug. The regularity of the pattern, the almost meditational effect created by the classical repetition of similar motifs, has always been a basic device of the carpet-maker's art. The Pazyryk carpet, dating, from the 3rd Century BC and the oldest known pile carpet in the world, displays a repeated device—half floral, half gul-like—throughout its central field. The konya carpets from the 13th Century, the oldest Islamic carpets yet discovered, employ repeated octagons on an open field which are very close indeed to the guls of surviving Turkoman rugs. Whether the occurrence of this design approach is due to superstition, cultural background, or simply the intuition of the nomadic weaver, there can be no denying its mysterious beauty within the confines of a carpet, a beauty which is enhanced by closely-worked detail in each motif and which harmonizes elegantly with the usually intricate and densely-ornamented border stripes and end panels.

Yet, with the apparent similarity in design between the gul-rugs of the various Turkoman tribes, it is often to the colouring that one initially refers in the evaluation of a piece seen for the first time. Red is the characteristic colour of almost every authentic Turkoman, and no people were more expert or more creative in their exploration of the possibilities contained within this single colour than were the master dyers of South Russia. Although it occurs in almost every example of the Turkoman rug, its range of shades is virtually endless, from the deepest and most sombre crimsons, from the cochineal shades of vermilion and near purple, through every variety of madder red where almost every knot has a different appearance, to clear, light hues of rose, apricot and peach, developing into browns, violets and terracotta as the dyers constantly experimented with new mixtures and techniques of application. Indigo, yellows, the nuances of undyed wool, green, cobalt blue, black and turquoise are all found in the rugs of the Turkoman, but almost invariably their role is to bring out the beauty of the red dyes, to delineate important and precise motifs against the underlying red ground of both field and borders. The very restraint with which the Turkoman employ these secondary colours gives them an impact quite out of keeping with the minimal extent of their use. It is this combination of the overriding significance and variation of the red dyes with the delicate and reserved usage of contrasting colours which lies at the core of a Turkoman rug's beauty. The appreciation of this effect is undoubtedly an acquired taste, but once acquired it provides the collector of old Turkoman rugs with one of the most satisfying and lingering-pleasures offered by the art of the Oriental rug.

THE SUZANIS OF THE UZBEKS

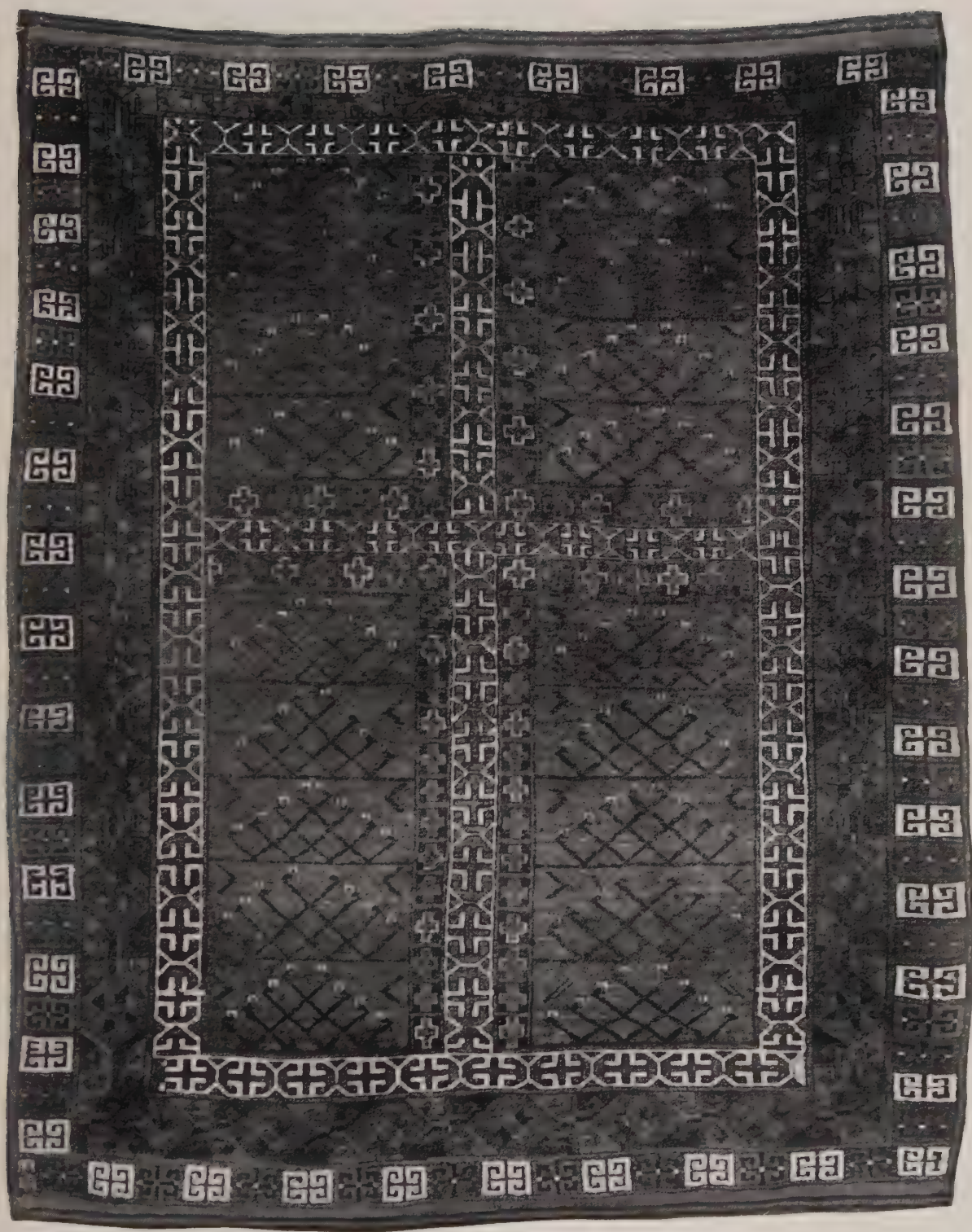
The great Uzbek tribes, occupying an area slightly North of the main Turkoman nomads, and of different descent, are renowned for the enormous variety of their textile crafts, and the brilliance of their jewellery. Apart from knotted rugs, of which few remain, there were also the dazzling silk dye patterns of their ikats, many woven belts, hats and cloaks, flat-woven rugs of great beauty and, most famous of all, their suzanis. Suzani in Persian means 'needle'— the name is given to a highly decorative textile embroidered in silk against a ground of locally-spun cotton. Ikat work is often found around the edges on the rear. They were made with immense care by the women of the tribe, to be a central part of a daughter's dowry— in the yurt or home, they were used as wall hangings, curtains, bed spreads and cloths to cover chests and tables. Some were designed for specific uses in the marriage ceremonies of the tribe. The precision and ornateness of their workmanship and patterning indicates that suzanis were held in the highest esteem by Uzbeks, as showcases for the skill and imagination of their female makers, and as examples of the sub-tribes standing and artistic ability.

Suzanis are made in two or more strips, the elder woman of the family drawing up the design, the younger women embroidering a single strip each. This system accounts for the occasional displacement of the design found in the older suzanis, such as in several in this exhibition.

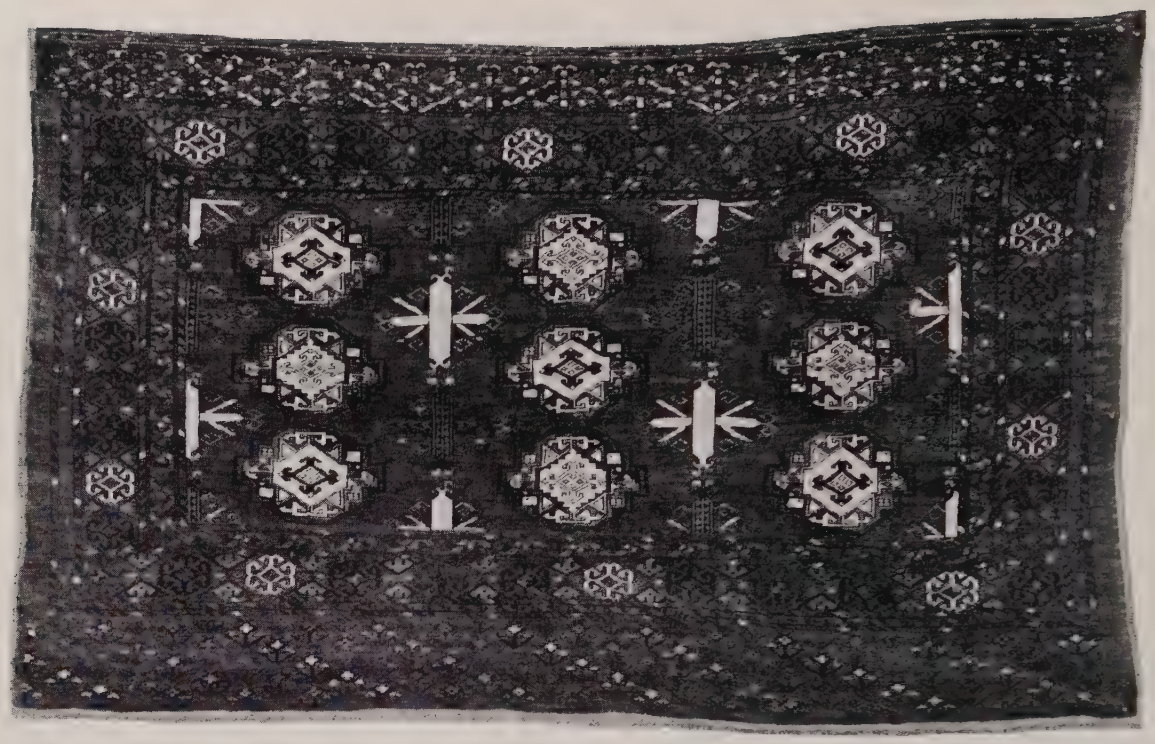
In design, suzanis are quite unlike any other textile works of the Central Asian Steppe, being far more floral in nature, with scrolling tendril stems, large circular flowerheads, and minutely-worked rosettes and small floral emblems. They appear closer to the Persian aesthetic than to that of their Turkoman neighbours, and this tendency was increased in later pieces, which were made for sale and barter rather than for the private use of the nomad family. Two fairly distinct design styles are found, with a geographical division. Those made approximately east of Samarkand, in the district of Tashkent, detail large, bold circles usually in dark colours, with the embroidery filling almost every available space of the cotton foundation. Those from west of Samarkand, from the Bokhara district ('Western Suzanis') usually contain light, brick red or apricot flowers, with turquoise and light blue being other favoured colours, these surrounded by thickly-drawn leaves and stems, usually in green. Both types are very rare today, and preference for one or the other is largely a matter of personal taste.

Suzanis, and all artifacts of Uzbek civilization, are in tremendous demand today. Their combination of the remote, individualistic art of the Steppe with a floral elegance of design and a marvellous sense of colouring finds a ready response among Western collectors. As with the rugs of the Turkoman, the textiles of the Uzbeks provide a glimpse into a rich and diverse culture which, to all intents and purposes, has long ceased to exist and it is fortunate that suzanis, made mainly for decorative rather than functional purposes, have come down to us in a remarkable state of preservation, with only the mellowness of the vegetable dyes and the supreme artistry of the hand-embroidery indicating that they have come from an age when commercial pressures did not exist, when the time spent on making a work of art was considered proportional to its eventual success. The suzanis of the Uzbek in this exhibition (Nos. 219-224) provide a unique opportunity to examine a large group of these works together, and to wonder at the skill and patience which has gone into their making.

198. OLD TURKOMAN (CIRCA 1900) 2·95m x 1·35m



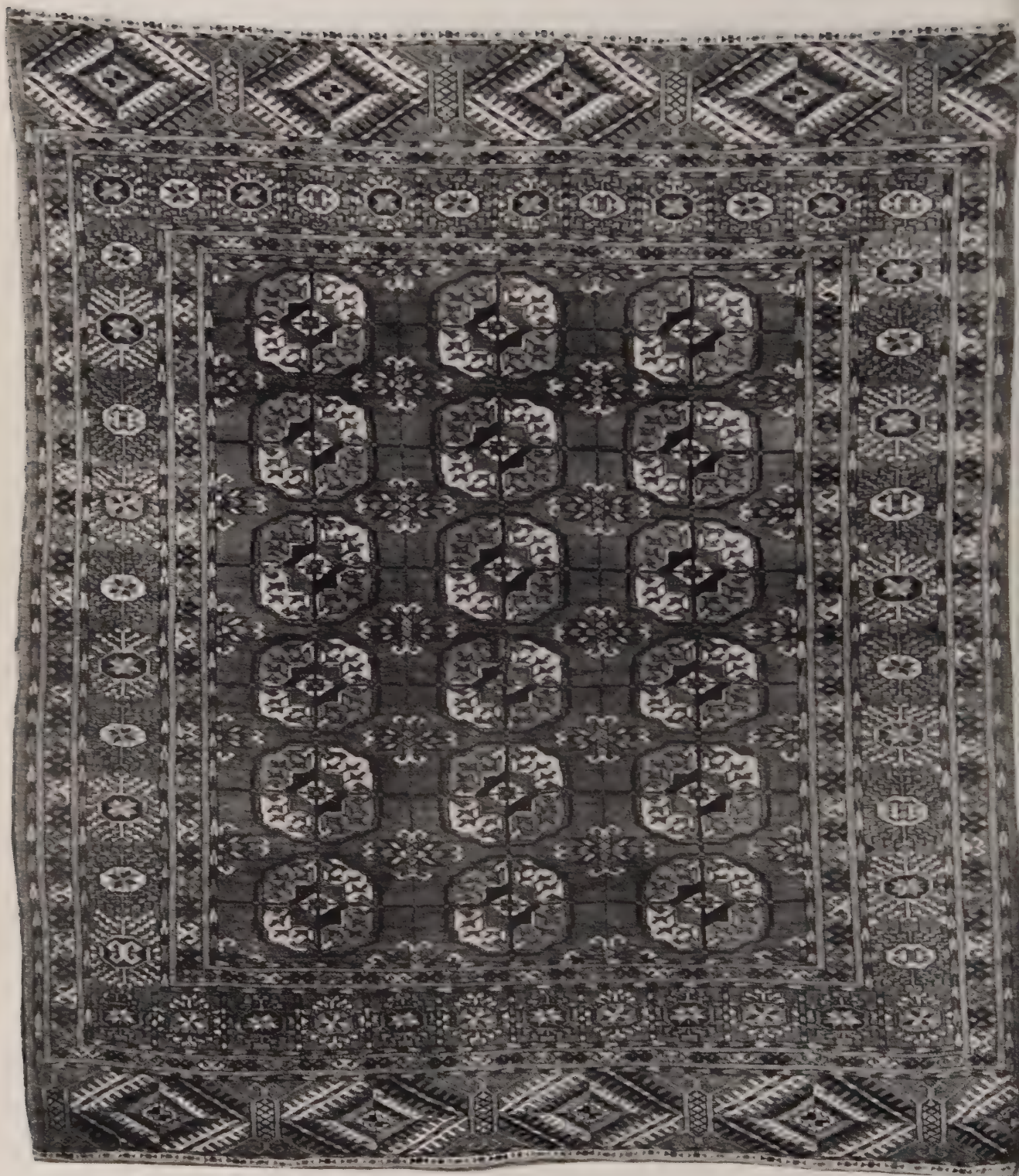
199. ANTIQUE YAMOUT HATCHLI (CIRCA 1850) 1·84m x 1·55m



200. OLD AFGHAN (WITH SILK) (CIRCA 1900) 1·72m x 1·02m

201. ANTIQUE JUVAL (MID-19TH CENTURY) 1·14m x 0·64m

202. OLD PENDE (DATED 1902) 1·32m x 0·89m

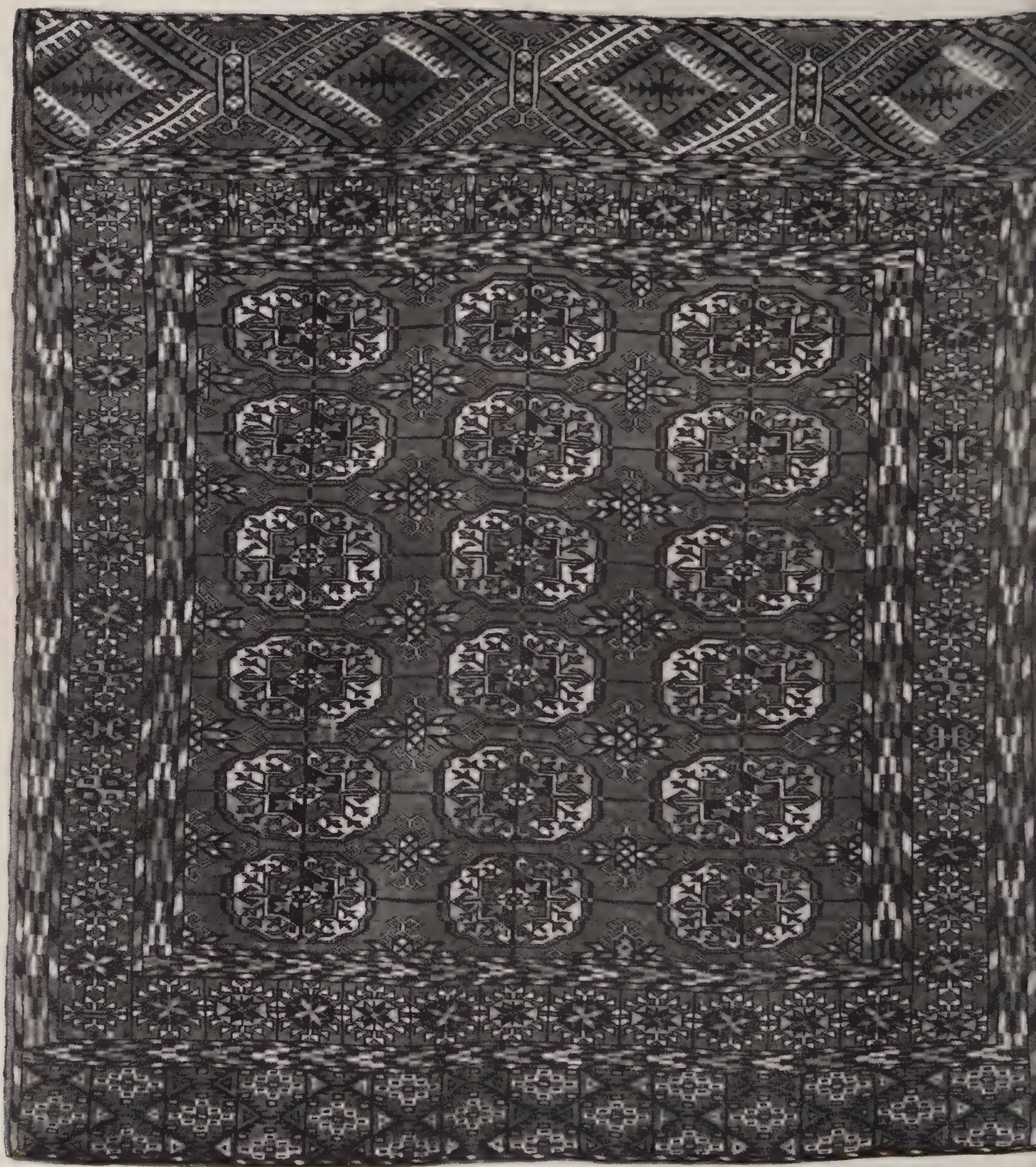


203. OLD TURKOMAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·39m x 1·19m

204. ANTIQUE YAMOUT (MID-19TH CENTURY) 3·17m x 1·88m

205. ANTIQUE AFGHAN (CIRCA 1850) 2·06m x 1·70m

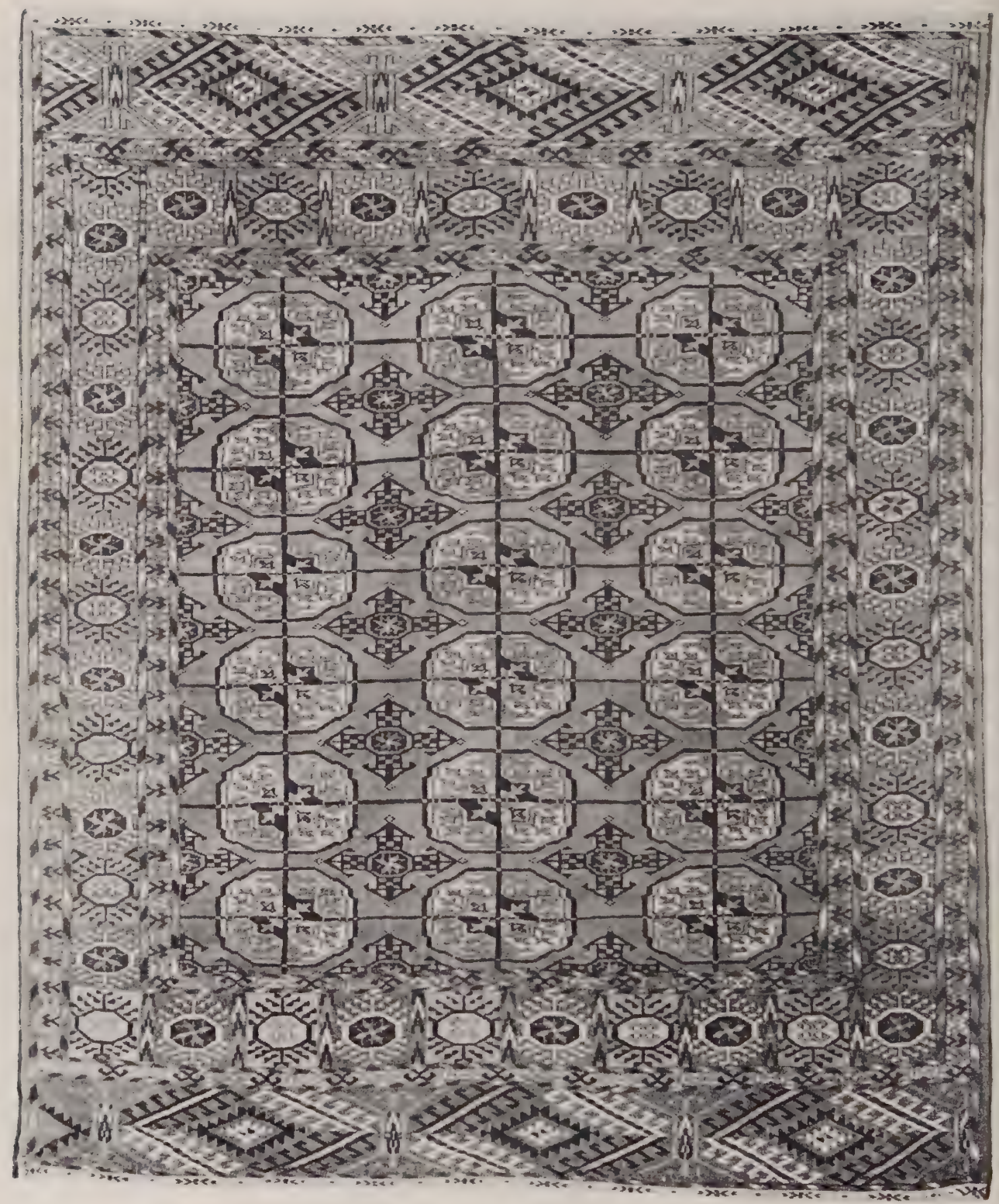
206. OLD YAMOUT HATCHLI (CIRCA 1900) 1·62m x 1·34m



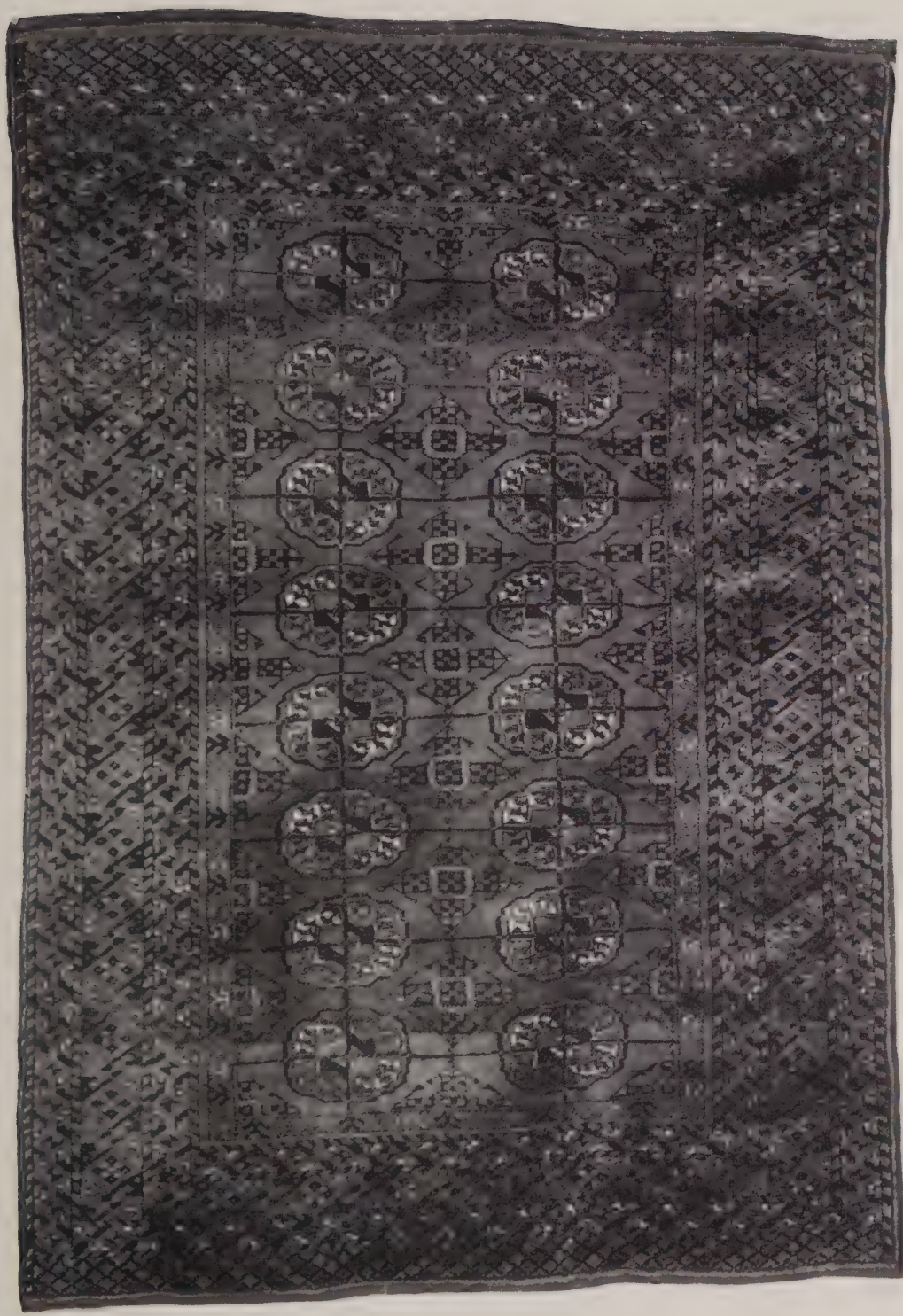
207. OLD TEKKE (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·23m x 1·12m

208. OLD TURKOMAN TENT DECORATION (CIRCA 1900) 1·02m x 0·40m

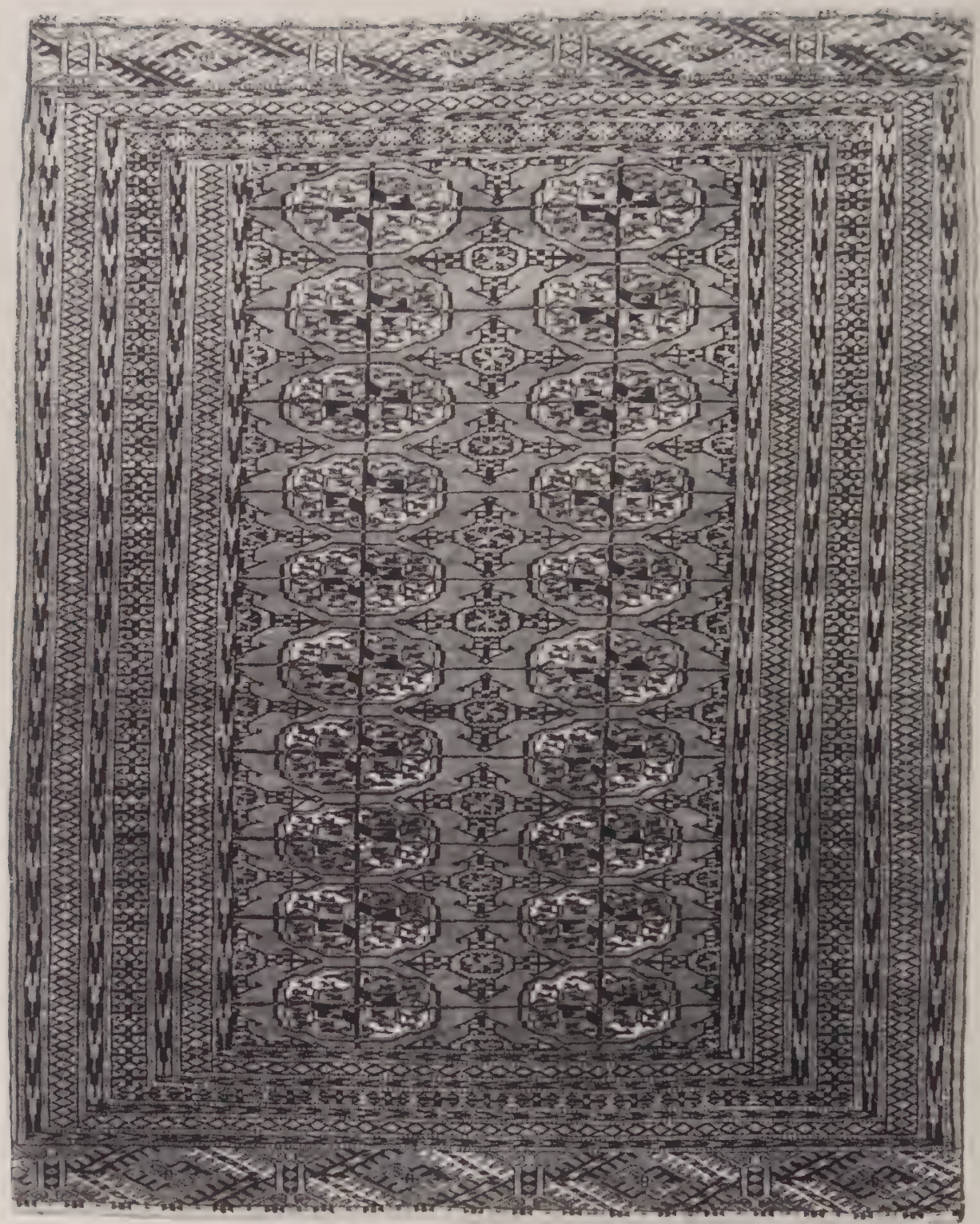
209. OLD JUVAL (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·60m x 0·95m



210. OLD TURKOMAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·29m x 1·07m

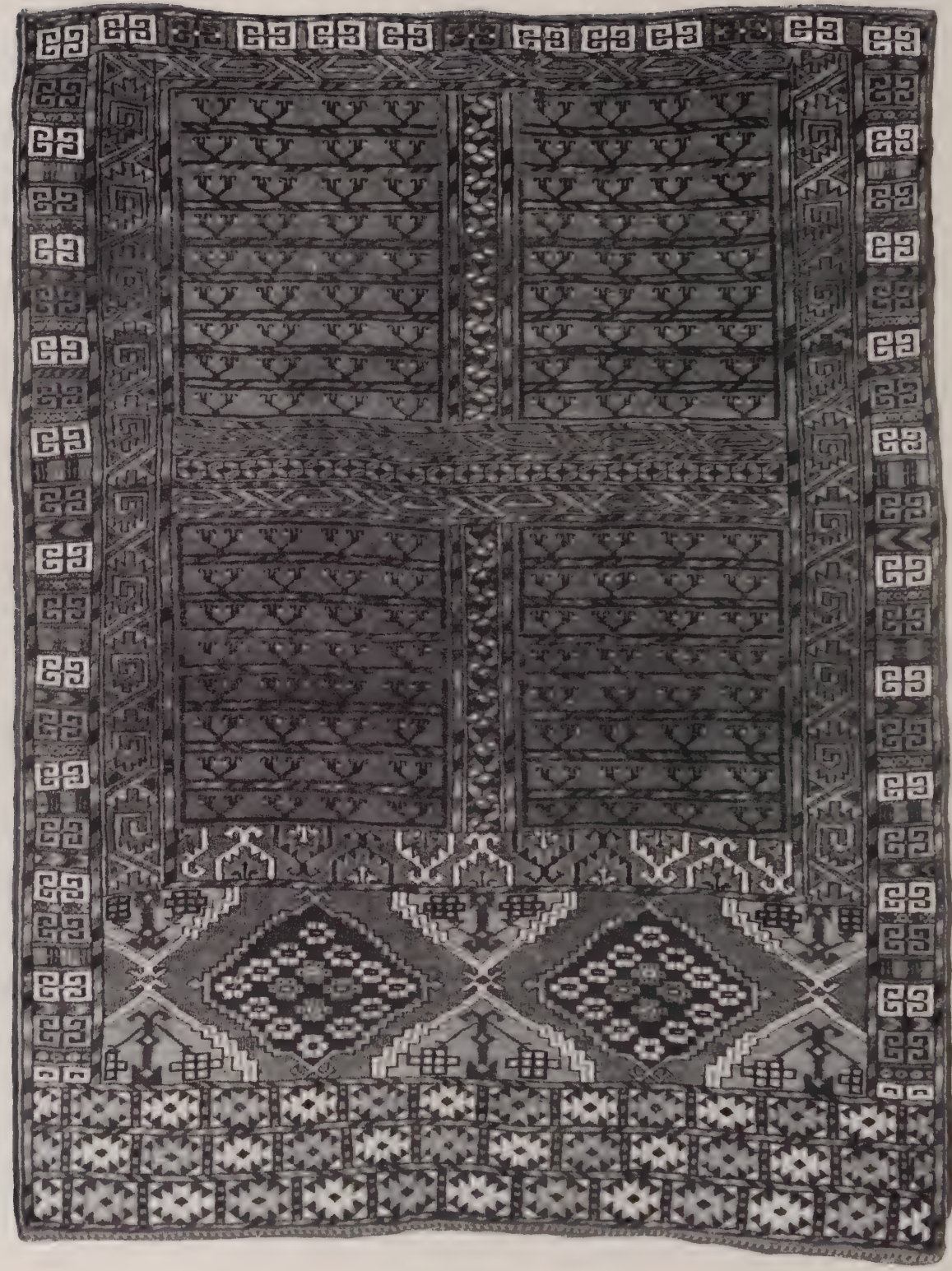


211. OLD AFGHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·85m x 1·26m

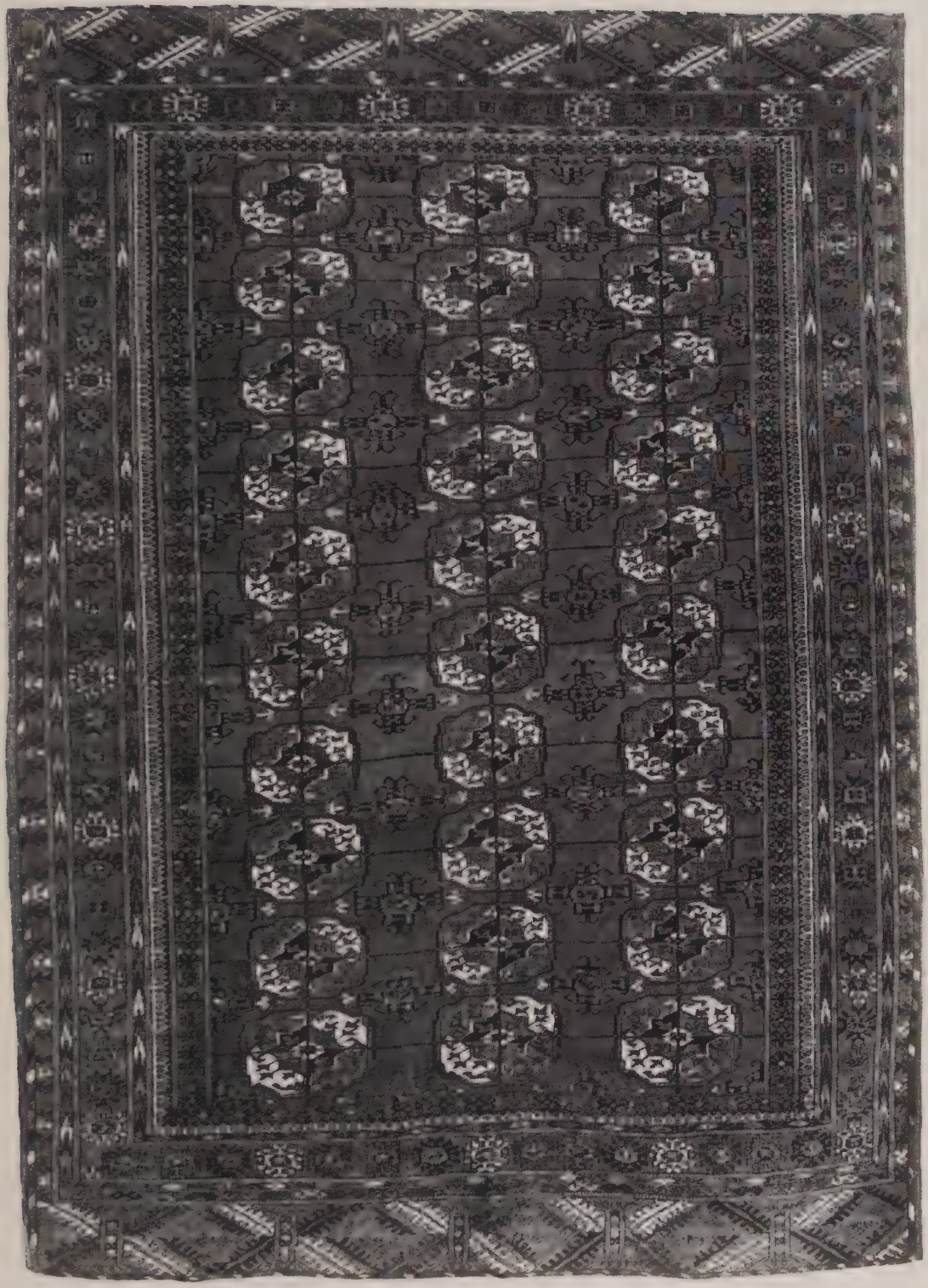


212. OLD BOKHARA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·46m x 1·15m

213. OLD TURKOMAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·88m x 1·50m



214. OLD AFGHAN HATCHLI (CIRCA 1900) 1·90m x 1·45m



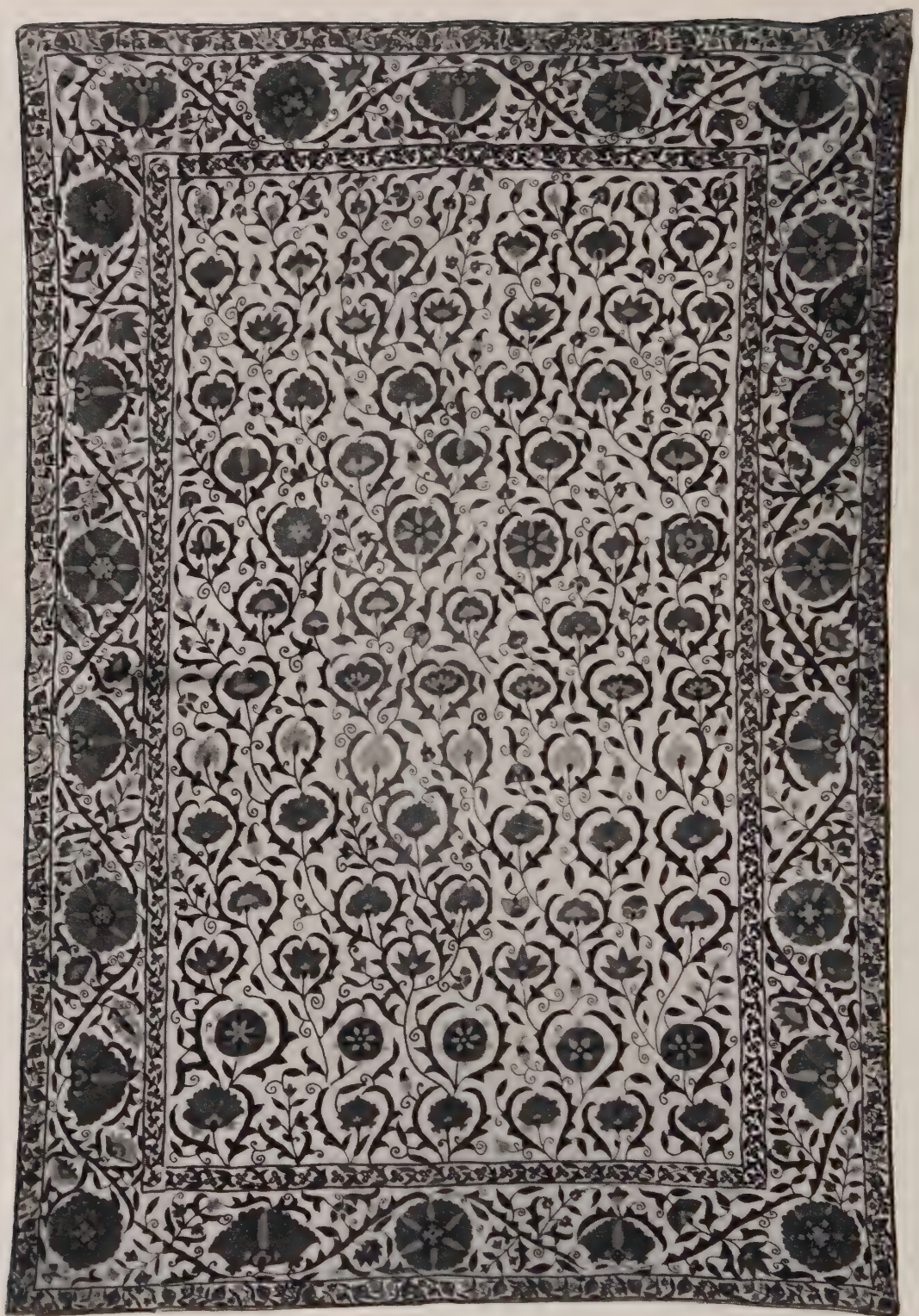
215. OLD BOKHARA (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·80m x 1·30m

216. OLD YAMOUT (CIRCA 1900) 3·00m x 1·88m

217. OLD BOKHARA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·02m x 1·32m

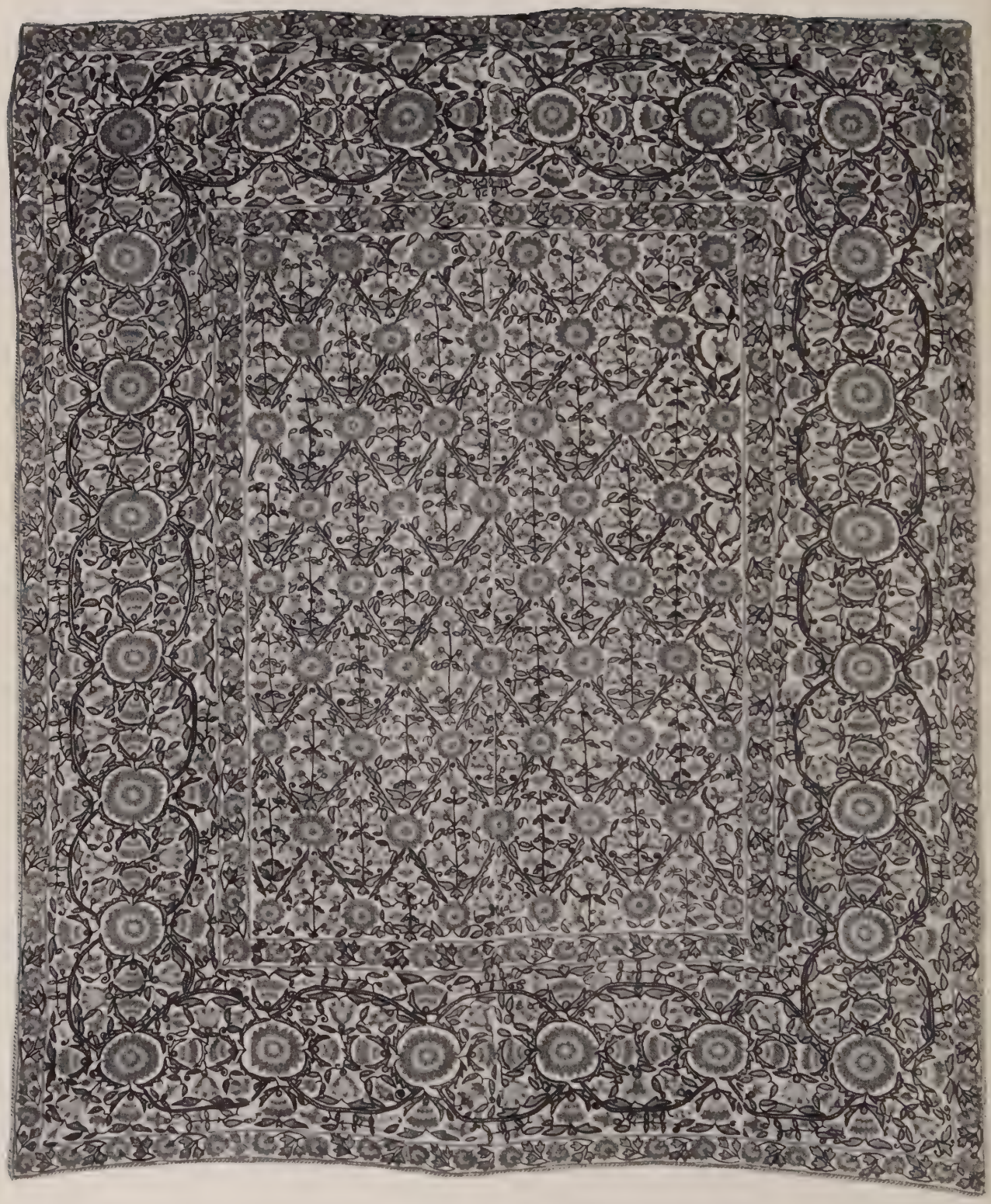
218. OLD BOKHARA (CIRCA 1900) 1·80m x 1·16m

219. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1850) 2·32m x 1·45m



220. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1850) 2·38m x 1·60m

221. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1800) 2·51m x 1·71m



222. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1850) 2·30m x 1·80m

223. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1850) 2·31m x 1·49m

224. ANTIQUE UZBEK SUZANI (CIRCA 1850) 3·00m x 2·10m

225. ANTIQUE YAMOUT (CIRCA 1850) 1·37m x 0·91m

226. OLD TURKOMAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·24m x 0·84m

227. OLD TURKOMAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·91m x 1·23m

228. OLD TURKOMAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·85m x 1·50m

229. OLD KIZIL AYAK (CIRCA 1900) 5·46m x 2·21m

230. OLD MERV KELIM (CIRCA 1900) 4·19m x 2·34m

231. OLD BESHIR (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·35m x 1·05m

232. OLD TEKKE (CIRCA 1900) 1·57m x 1·21m

233. OLD TEKKE (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 1·48m x 0·95m

234. OLD BOKHARA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·60m x 1·11m

235. OLD HATCHLI (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·13m x 0·88m

236. OLD AFGHAN (CIRCA 1900) 1·08m x 0·93m

237. OLD AFGHAN (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·04m x 1·84m

238. OLD AFGHAN (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 4·15m x 2·84m

Chinese Carpets and Rugs

The rugs and carpets of China are so completely different in virtually every aspect to all other Oriental rugs that they may almost be considered as another form of textile art. Nevertheless, they meet the basic requirements of the definition 'Oriental rug'—i.e., they are knotted by hand, in wool on warps and weft of cotton, and they originate from the Eastern or Oriental producing area—and certain elements, particularly of their design, have had profound influence on the more traditional Oriental rugs made in the Near East.

This influence of the Chinese carpet, spread along the ancient Silk Route from China, through East Turkestan, Persia and Turkey, created a synthesis between the overtly symbolic nature of Buddhist art and the abstract, decorative yet underlyingly religious aesthetic which emanated from Islam. This combination was to result in some of the most beautiful and renowned carpets ever made—the magnificent Renaissance carpets of the Sefavid Persian Court and the masterpieces produced in the Royal Manufactories of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey. Motifs such as the Cloud Band, certain animal figures, the Swastika fret, a style of floral drawing and several repeated border designs which became characteristic devices of the more sophisticated Islamic carpets from the 16th Century onwards all find their origins in the design of Chinese art objects—presumably including carpets, of which no early examples exist, yet such designs are still found in their original form in extant Chinese carpets from the Ming dynasty to today.

For reason of their profound influence on the development of the Islamic carpet, and for the unique and subtle pleasure which they provide, we have included a small group of fine old Chinese rugs and carpets in this exhibition.

Even the most cursory comparison between a Chinese rug and an Islamic rug from the Near East will reveal the gulf of design, colouring and even weave which lies between the two styles. The Chinese rug is worked in very few colours—often only two or three, with brown, blue, white, yellow, red and green being the most frequently employed shades. Whereas in the rugs of Persia, the Caucasus or Turkey, colours are employed in striking or harmonious juxtaposition with each other, the Chinese sense of colour prefers extremely delicate and subtle variations on perhaps only a single colour. This sensitive exploration of a colour's possibilities, with shades of the same colour being orchestrated into what is basically a tone poem, provides a totally different artistic experience to the viewer than does the richness and variety of colour normally associated with the Oriental carpet and requires evaluative criteria of quite a different order from those usually applied to hand-made carpets. Where one associates the use of colour in Caucasian and various tribal rugs with dramatic and powerful effect, in Persian carpets with intricate and dazzlingly complex harmonies, the Chinese carpet solicits an air of calm contemplation, an elusive and highly sophisticated quality which, it must be admitted, is something of an acquired taste.

In design, Chinese rugs and carpets are again quite different to their Islamic counterparts although, as mentioned above, elements in Chinese design are to be found in carpets from almost every other origin. In the overall composition of a Chinese rug, the empty spaces of a single colour have as much significance and impact as the finely detailed motifs and symbols which appear within them : in Chinese and Zen Buddhist art in general, the vast, empty spaces encompassing the often miniscule main subject matter are a characteristic feature. This use of open areas of a single colour in Chinese carpets again stresses the importance of colour rather than design in such works, as well as contributing to the calm and peaceful appearance of the traditional Chinese rug. The design motifs themselves, usually drawn with tremendous precision and delicacy, almost invariably possess a well-defined symbolic meaning or significance, based upon Buddhist and Taoist philosophy, or symbolic configurations of Chinese written characters. While there can be little doubt that many of the motifs which appear in Islamic rugs, particularly in those of nomadic origin, once had a living symbolic meaning, over the centuries that meaning has been forgotten or submerged within the folk consciouness of the tribe, and it is thus impossible for us today to interpret such symbols. The symbols in the Chinese carpet, on the other hand, are strictly defined, with an enormous range of motifs representing Happiness, Good Luck, Wealth, Imperial Power, Wordly Success and so forth. The Chinese rug can thus be accurately 'read' in a manner which is no longer applicable to the traditional Islamic carpets.

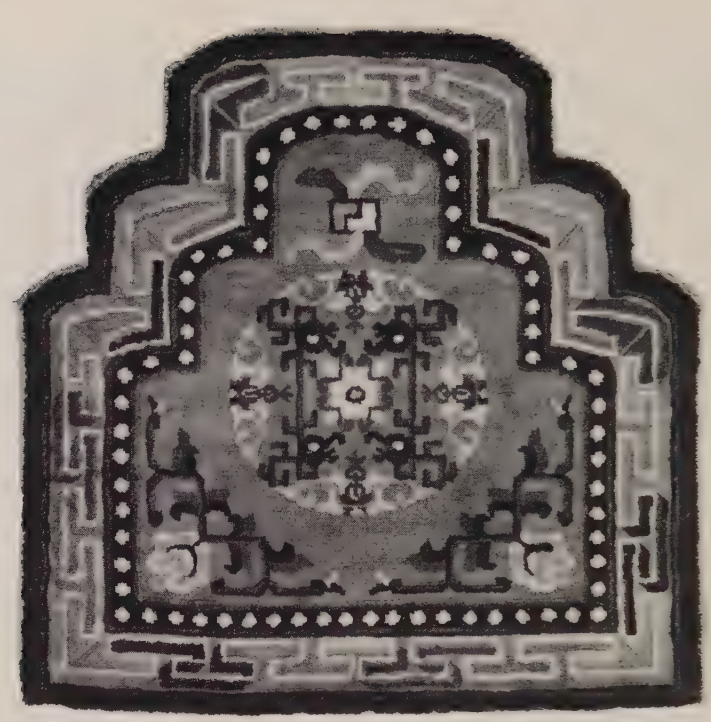
Even in the technique of their manufacture, Chinese carpets possess certain unique features not found in other Oriental rugs. Although tied in the Persian knot on cotton warps strung on a horizontal loom, with wefts inserted between each row of knots, basic similarities with the rugs of the Near East end there. The yarn employed in the tying of the knots is thick and loosely-piled, often formed from several strands to create a denser, far less fine knot than is characteristic in other carpets. It is cut much higher,

to make a deep, soft pile, and the number of wefts inserted between each row of knots, usually four of thick, stiff cotton, creates a slanting 'lie' to the pile of the finished carpet which is quite distinctive. Thus, even if a Persian design is copied in a Chinese rug, there is an unmistakeable difference in the 'handle' of the rug to its Persian equivalent, and the design itself, however accurately copied, will have a different appearance caused by the peculiar structuring of the Chinese pile. Also, in many Chinese rugs both old and contemporary, the design is often embossed or incised, the pile cut in differing lengths with special scissors to give a relief or three-dimensional aspect to the pattern. In the older Chinese rugs, this embossing technique was employed sparingly and imaginatively to create a special effect, particularly to delicately differentiate separate elements in a motif which was worked in almost matching shades of the same colour—in modern Chinese rugs, the embossing has unfortunately become mannered and almost meaningless.

The examples of Chinese rugs and carpets in this exhibition have been selected to illustrate the relationship between Chinese works and the main tradition of Islamic carpet making which is the central theme of the exhibition. They are also outstanding examples of the unique art of the Chinese carpet, that subtle mixture of delicate colouring, of symbolism and of brilliant and controlled design which finds no equivalent in the rugs of any other origin.

239. OLD CHINESE (CIRCA 1900) 2·25m x 1·33m

240. OLD CHINESE (LATE 19TH CENTURY) 2·95m x 2·49m



241. ANTIQUE NINGHSIA (CIRCA 1850) 0·63m x 0·63m

242. ANTIQUE NINGHSIA (CIRCA 1850) 0·55m x 0·55m

243. ANTIQUE NINGHSIA (CIRCA 1850) 1·62m x 0·81m

244. ANTIQUE CHINESE (MID-19TH CENTURY) 2·26m x 1·30m

245. OLD CHINESE (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·23m x 0·67m

246. OLD CHINESE (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 1·21m x 0·67m

247. OLD CHINESE (CIRCA 1900) 3·55m x 2·80m

248. OLD CHINESE (CIRCA 1900) 3·60m x 2·85m

249. OLD CHINESE (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 4·32m x 3·33m

250. OLD CHINESE (EARLY 20TH CENTURY) 2·97m x 2·45m

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